

# Annual school and trust governance survey

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July 2024

A research study by the  
National Governance Association



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# Foreword

As we present the findings of our Annual School and Trust Governance Survey 2024, we find ourselves at a critical juncture in education. Schools and trusts face an increasingly complex context in which they must operate, and out of which governing boards must make the right decisions for the future.



Sam Henson,  
Deputy Chief  
Executive, NGA

In many ways, this set of circumstances is unprecedented for the system – boards have dealt with many of these issues before, but it is hard to think of a time when they have faced so many challenges at once. At the heart of our findings, however, lies one persistent and intensifying issue: the struggle to balance budgets in an era of increasing demands and constraints.

This year, we are seeing budget concerns reach a climactic point, even when compared to 2016-2019 when financial concerns rose almost to a fever pitch before additional money was finally pushed into the system. Unsurprisingly, some of the challenges became far more manageable with more funds available. But we all know that relief was short-lived, before a world-wide pandemic and national cost of living crisis, among other things, massively disrupted progress.


The number of governing boards citing their top challenge as balancing the budget is the highest in our survey's history. This financial strain is not merely a matter of numbers; it profoundly impacts every aspect of education, from curriculum breadth and staff wellbeing, to SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) provision and environmental sustainability initiatives.

The survey also reveals a tale of two educational phases, each grappling with distinct priorities shaped by their unique contexts. The contrast between secondary and primary settings is particularly striking this year, especially regarding budget pressures and attendance issues. For instance, the staggering 27 percentage point gap in budget pressures between primary and secondary schools show us just how dramatically falling pupil numbers is having an impact in primary settings.

Going beyond finances, we're witnessing a sector under immense pressure to act as a 'fourth emergency service', filling gaps left by a range of diminishing social services. Governing boards are increasingly having to make tough decisions about the additional support needed for not only pupils, but also their families and even the wider community. From food provision to mental health support, stretching already thin resources even further, boards and school and trust leaders are doing so much for so many. The efforts made represent staggering achievement, but many of our respondents have raised the poignant question – how sustainable is this and how can we keep going at this pace?

SEND provision remains a critical concern, with inadequate funding and inconsistent support services hampering efforts to provide quality education to all pupils. The situation is exacerbated by a dwindling pool of external support services and an outdated funding system that has failed to keep pace with the evolving landscape of special education.

Amidst these challenges, we see the resilience and adaptability of our school and trusts boards. So many also talk about the strategies and commitment to finding resolutions, to building improvement and to delivering true ambition against the odds. Anyone who reads this report I hope will gain an understanding of the full extent of the passion and devotion that this incredible group of volunteers has for their pupils, their staff, and their school communities.



However, no amount of optimism or motivation can take us away from the common thread linking these challenges – the sustainability of the sector and the risk of it facing more than it can handle. It calls for innovative strategies not left entirely at the hands of boards and leaders themselves. If any one of NGA’s survey reports stretching back 14 years has ever shown the vital need for systemic reforms, this is the one.

As the governance community navigates these turbulent waters, the role of governing boards in steering their institutions towards sustainability and excellence has never been more important. With the role becoming more consuming, and more questioning if they can keep doing it, we need to look ahead and ask how can we engage the next generation of governance volunteers? It is a nuanced conversation, but one that we hope the Department for Education (DfE) and those on high will take more ownership of.

We release this report just as we acknowledge the arrival of a new government, who will come with new ideas. Our biggest offering to that conversation is this – read this report, pay attention to what our governors and trustees are telling us. They know their organisations and strive to create a balance between their role as a crucial line of accountability with empowering school and trust leaders with confidence and support to deliver the best possible outcomes for pupils.

It’s clear that governing boards are taking a holistic view of education that goes beyond academic metrics. Their strategic priorities reflect a commitment to pupil wellbeing, inclusivity, and the quality of the overall educational experience. This multifaceted approach

to school and trust governance will be crucial as institutions continue to adapt to the evolving needs of the community and the broader society in which they operate.

The challenges we face are formidable, but so too is the dedication and resilience of our schools, trusts, their leaders, staff and their governing boards. Our pupils deserve the very best opportunity to start life with the very best education. By working together – the government, sector organisations, school and trust leaders and governing boards – we can navigate these challenges and emerge stronger, more adaptable, and better equipped to meet the needs of future generations.

# Methodology

The Annual School and Trust Governance Survey is a self-selecting, online survey that has been conducted by NGA for 14 consecutive years. It provides a comprehensive overview of school and trust governance, involving governors, trustees and local governors from state-funded schools in England.

The survey was disseminated predominantly through NGA's communication channels. Respondents do not need to be members of NGA, but 80% reported that they are. This year, the survey was conducted from 15 April to 27 May 2024 and over 3,000 people took part. The total number of responses varies across the survey according to question requirements and/or target subgroups (see tables 1 - 4).

The survey was hosted and analysed using Edurio's research-based survey platform. Data analysis identified trends and variations based on region, school type, phase, and other respondent demographics.

## Representativeness

The proportion of survey respondents from different school structures is similar to that of state schools in England with half of respondents governing in trusts in 2024.

Governing board type	N.	% of respondents	% of schools in England
Maintained	1521	50%	50%
Single academy trust	276	9%	50%
Multi academy trust	751	25%	
Local governing board/academy committee	495	16%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>3043</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1, survey respondents by board type compared to the percentage of state schools in England

Primary school respondents are slightly underrepresented and secondary school respondents, slightly overrepresented.

School/trust phase	N.	% of respondents	% of schools in England
Nursery	22	1%	2%
Primary (including infant and junior)	1901	63%	77%
Secondary (including those with sixth forms)	639	21%	16%
All-through	74	2%	N/A
Special	155	5%	4%
Alternative provision or pupil referral unit	18	1%	2%
I govern in a group of schools which spans multiple phases	191	6%	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>3000</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2, survey respondents by phase compared to the percentage of state schools in England

Respondents from most regions align with national data with the exception of the South East which is overrepresented.

Region	N.	% of respondents	% of schools in England
South East	655	22%	15%
South West	282	9%	11%
London	254	9%	12%
East Midlands	310	10%	9%
West Midlands	274	9%	11%
North West	489	16%	14%
North East	145	5%	5%
East of England	254	9%	12%
Yorkshire and Humber	289	10%	10%
I govern in a group of schools which spans multiple regions	25	1%	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>2977</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3, geographical spread of survey respondents compared to the percentage of state schools in England

Role	No.	% of respondents
Chair	839	32%
Co-chair	55	2%
Vice chair	366	14%
Committee chair	220	8%
Other governor/trustee	1056	40%
Ex-officio (by virtue of another position eg headteacher)	98	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2634</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4, survey respondents by governance role

## Survey questions



Certain questions in the annual survey appear every other year. This is so that we can explore these topics longitudinally whilst also leaving room for more in-detail questions on other topical issues to keep the survey relevant to current affairs but manageable for respondents. Should you wish to explore last year's topics, please [see our report from 2023](#).

## Terminology

This report uses the following terms to describe school and trust governance roles and structures:

- **Maintained schools** – schools that receive support and oversight from local authorities, including those within federations.
- **Multi academy trusts (MATs)** – two or more academies governed by a single board of trustees.
- **Single academy trusts (SATs)** – a single academy, operating under its own trust.
- **Local governors** – a member of an academy committee (also known as a local governing body or LGB) within a MAT.

## Acknowledgements

NGA would like to acknowledge our sincere appreciation to Edurio, the leading survey experts in the sector, for their invaluable support and guidance. Their collaboration in formulating survey questions and the ease of use of Edurio's platform to analyse results has made a huge contribution to the ongoing high quality of NGA's longitudinal governance research.

NGA would also like to thank the respondents that took the time to complete the survey and share their views and experiences of school and trust governance. The valuable data joins a collection of longitudinal data and guides NGA's work to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards.

The authors would also like to thank Ella Colley, Head of Content, for her work on the production of this report.



# Key findings

## Funding

### Financial sustainability under threat

Only 19% of schools and trusts perceive themselves as financially sustainable in the medium to long term, with deep-seated concerns about future financial viability growing more severe.

### Budget pressures intensify

An alarming 60% of governing boards now cite balancing the budget as their top challenge, up from 52% in the previous year and 40% in 2020 – the highest ever recorded, highlighting the growing financial strain on schools and trusts.

### Falling pupil numbers

39% of respondents overall report that their finances have been impacted by falling pupil numbers. This is more of a concern for primary schools (45%) than secondary schools (23%). A further 23% have not yet been impacted but are worried about this in the near future.

### Curriculum breadth at risk

A concerning 59% of respondents report having to reduce teaching or cut certain subjects due to budget constraints, compromising the breadth and quality of education offered.

### SEND funding crisis deepens

Access to funding is the top SEND challenge, reported by 74% of governing boards – up from 66% last year.

## Pupil, family and community needs

### SEND support demands surge

The proportion of boards identifying support for children with special educational needs as a top challenge has risen dramatically to 37%, from 25% in 2022, reflecting the increasing complexity of needs in classrooms.

### Attendance is high priority

Attendance features prominently as both a top challenge (32%) and a key strategic priority (33%) for governing boards, underscoring its critical importance in the current educational landscape.

### Expanding school services

Half of respondents (51%) said there has been an increase in the support provided by their school or trust in response to wider societal needs in the past 12 months.

### Safeguarding issues growing

Nearly half (49%) of respondents report an increase in safeguarding concerns in the past 12 months, with bullying, neglect, and domestic abuse topping the list, indicating a growing need for robust safeguarding measures.



## Staffing, resources and accountability

### Staffing challenges

Secondary schools grapple with acute recruitment (66%) and retention (43%) challenges, with rates more than double those of primary schools. In contrast, almost half of primary schools (45%) face a struggle to maintain staff structures amid falling enrolment, a challenge cited twice as frequently as in secondary phases.

### Staff CPD needs greater focus

Only 54% of respondents reported regularly reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of their organisation's CPD programmes and initiatives for staff. 39% said they do this infrequently and worryingly, 7% said they never do this.

### Declining school building conditions

Nearly half (49%) of respondents agree that the condition of their school buildings negatively impacts the learning environment, underscoring the need for significant investment in educational infrastructure.

### Ofsted's pervasive influence

51% of respondents identify Ofsted as the single most significant factor shaping practice within their school or trust, raising questions about the balance between accountability, local needs and drivers in education.

## Governance volunteers and recruitment challenges

### Underrepresentation persists

Respondents aged 60 and over has reached its highest levels since the survey began, with over half now sitting in this category (52%). Only 9% of governance volunteers are under 40, with a mere 1% under 30, continuing the significant underrepresentation of younger perspectives in school and trust governance.

### More volunteers looking to resign

There has been a 4% increase in respondents who are considering resigning from their governance role (30%) compared to 2023. Concerningly, the majority of the rise comes from an increase in those who strongly agree (9%).

### Ethnic diversity deficit

Of those surveyed who disclosed their ethnicity, a stark 95% identify as white, underscoring the stubborn lack of ethnic diversity in governance roles and the risk that boards are often not reflective of the communities they serve.

### Recruitment challenges widespread

76% of respondents report difficulty in recruiting new governors and trustees, with regional variations highlighting the uneven distribution of this challenge across the country.

### Employer support lacking

Only 29% of respondents now receive paid time off for governance duties, down from 43% in 2015, potentially affecting the ability to attract and retain volunteers from diverse professional backgrounds.

### Workload concerns are growing

While 76% of respondents agree their governance role is manageable, this represents a 4% decrease from the previous year, with those strongly disagreeing doubling, signalling increasing workload pressures.

# Challenges and priorities

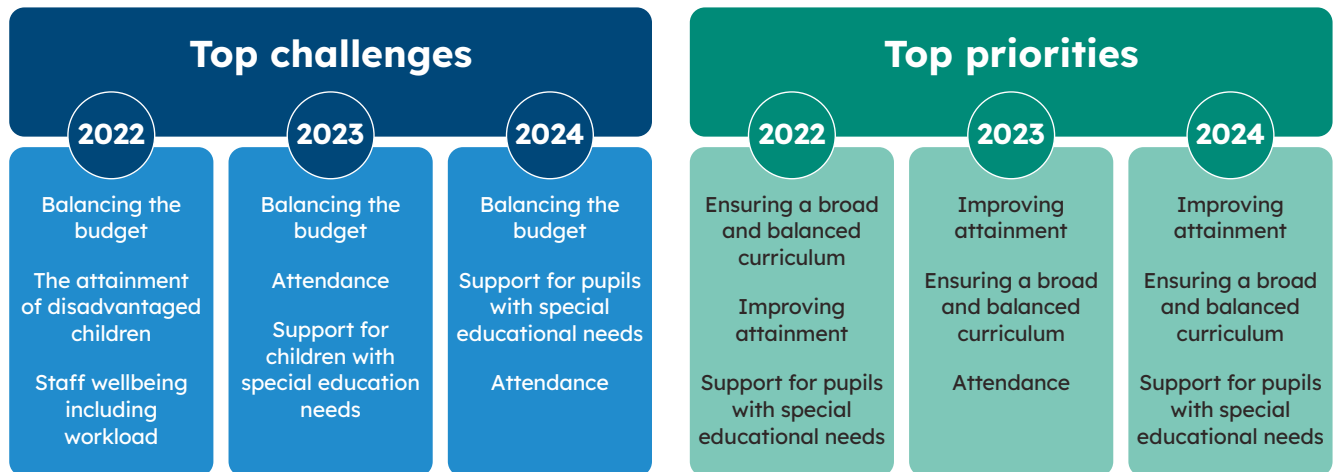


Figure 1, top challenges and priorities reported over three years

## The challenges facing schools and trusts

The educational governance landscape of 2024 is marked by a complex interplay of financial pressures, evolving and greater pupil needs, and demographic shifts; creating a perfect storm of challenges for school and trust boards across England.

“Pupils seem less ready to engage with schooling. The fact that some families are struggling to make ends meet has an impact on pupil wellbeing and behaviour, which impacts staff wellbeing and workload. There are insufficient mechanisms outside of school supporting children and families...”

Respondents were asked to identify the top three challenges facing their school or trust from a list of 16 options. Respondents were also able to tell us of any others using ‘free text’ comments. Each of these issues is explored in greater detail in respective sections within this report.

“I honestly feel like picking three minimises the impact of the others. We are struggling with Staffing, Funding, attainment, cost of living, SEND, workload etc all on an even scale.”



A staggering 60% of governing boards now cite balancing the budget as their biggest challenge, a significant leap from 52% in 2023 and the highest on record since we have asked this specific question. This financial strain is not evenly distributed across the education sector, with nursery and primary schools reporting more challenges. An overwhelming majority of these institutions – 69% of nurseries and 67% of primary schools – are grappling with balancing the budget as their top concern, possibly due to their smaller size and the impact of falling pupil numbers.

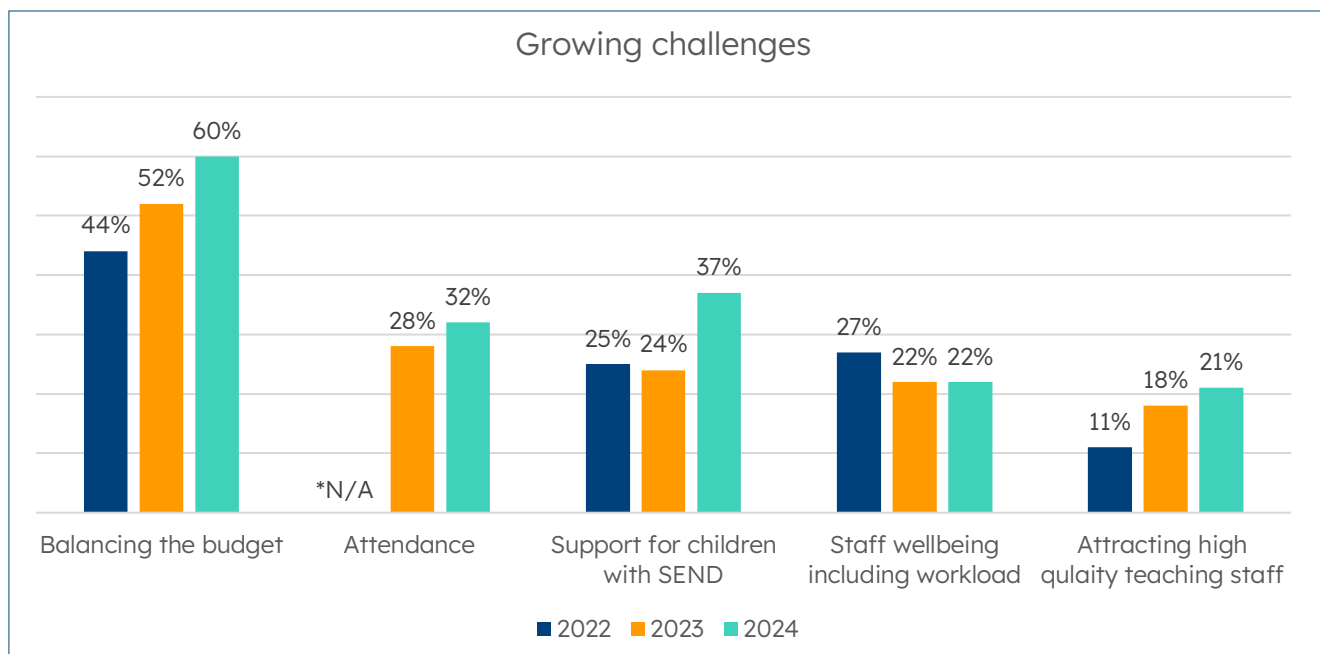


Figure 2, percentage of respondents that identified the areas shown as one of the top challenges faced by their school or trust, shown over three years

\*Attendance was not available for respondents to select as a challenge prior to 2023.

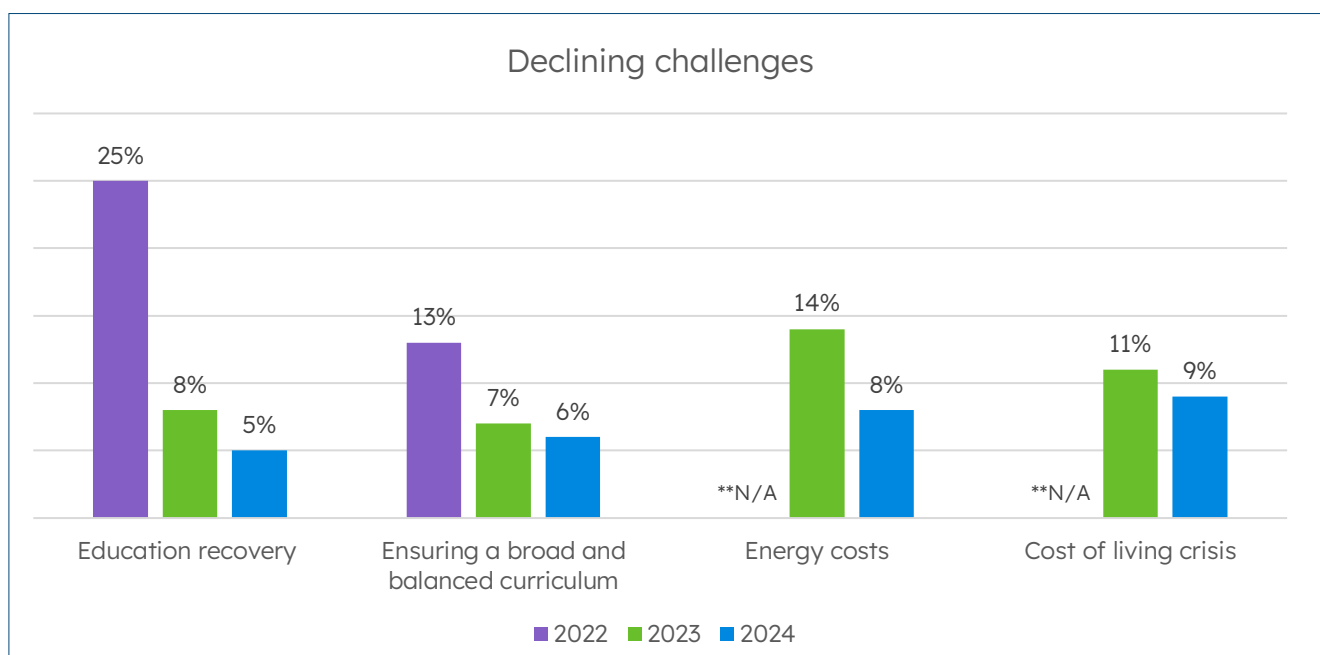


Figure 3, percentage of respondents that identified the areas shown as one of their top challenges faced by their school or trust, shown over three years

\*\*Energy costs and cost of living were not available for respondents to select as a challenge prior to 2023.

## Comparison of top challenges

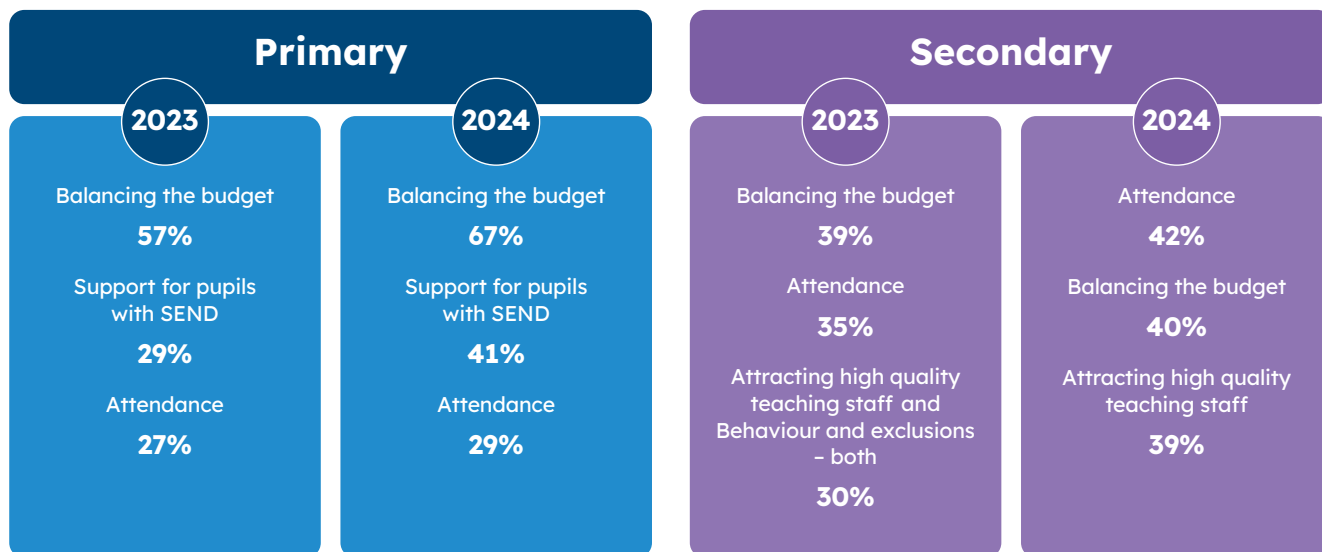


Figure 4, top challenges reported by respondents (shown by phase for 2023 and 2024)

“The school has continued to enable most children to make good progress, including those in vulnerable groups, but our capacity to maintain this efficacy is rapidly diminishing.”

Compounding these financial pains is the growing challenge of supporting children with SEND. In just two years, the proportion of boards identifying SEND support as a top challenge has surged from 22% to 37%. This dramatic increase reflects not only a growing awareness of diverse learning needs but also the mounting complexity of these needs in today’s classrooms.

“Lack of support for pupils – particularly SEN support – at a time when budget is really stretched. The financial restraints are huge.”

“There is simply not enough money to run a school. Furthermore, other services have been so brutally destroyed by Government that schools are picking up the pieces and trying to be health workers, social workers, counsellors, food banks, clothing banks, and the last remaining aspect of civic infrastructure left in their community.”

Attendance also featured in the top three challenges for boards in 2024. While national data suggests an improving trend in school attendance, our survey tells a different story. The number of respondents citing attendance as a top challenge has climbed from 28% to 32% over the past year, topping the list for secondary schools, even ahead of balancing the budget. Again, this discrepancy between national statistics and local experiences warrants further investigation but points to an increasing level of challenge in engaging both pupils and parents in different stages of schooling.

The issue of falling pupil numbers has increased over the last three years to become the sixth most cited challenge overall, with nearly a fifth (19%) of respondents flagging it as a major concern.

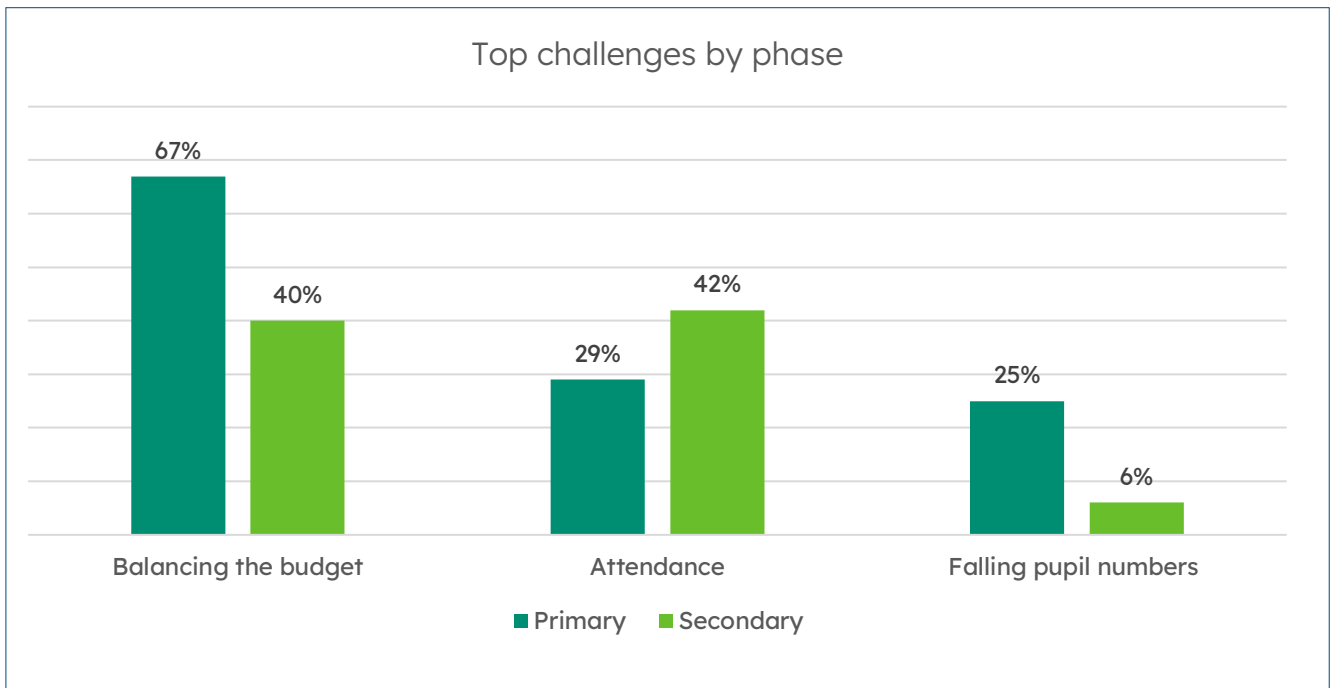


Figure 5, percentage of respondents that identified the areas shown as one of the top challenges faced by their school or trust, vs the phase of education

This is especially true for those governing in London, with 28% of respondents selecting falling pupil numbers as a challenge. This is an indicator of a profound change now impacting an increasing swathe of the educational landscape. With birth rates declining over the last 10 years significantly compared the historic highs of 2012, schools – particularly in nursery and primary phases – have already braced for a seismic impact.

The implications of this demographic trend are particularly acute for early years and primary education providers, with a quarter of respondents in these sectors citing falling numbers as a top challenge compared with just 6% of secondary school governors and trustees.

## Strategic priorities

At the forefront of these priorities, improving attainment once again continues to take top position. This year, a substantial 38% of respondents identified it as one of their priorities, marking a small yet notable four percentage point increase from 2023.

This upward trend underscores the persistent pressure on schools to demonstrate measurable academic progress, possibly intensified by the lingering effects of pandemic-related learning disruptions and the ever-present scrutiny of performance metrics.

“Many of the areas are overlapping and we would consider them all relevant to achieving our overall strategic objective of providing an excellent education to all.”

Support for pupils with SEND and attendance are tied as third-ranked top priorities overall, both having also appeared in the top three challenges. This alignment between recognised challenges and strategic priorities indicates that governing boards are adopting a responsive approach to the issues most acutely affecting their schools, together with a long-term, strategic focus.

### Attendance: top priority in secondary phase

Secondary schools present a striking picture, with attendance rocketing to the top of their strategic agenda, cited by 44% of respondents (compared to 30% in 2023). This is followed by improving attainment (40%) while the priority of attracting high-quality teaching staff rounds out the top three, with the difficulty in recruiting to specialised subject areas at the secondary level being a notable concern.

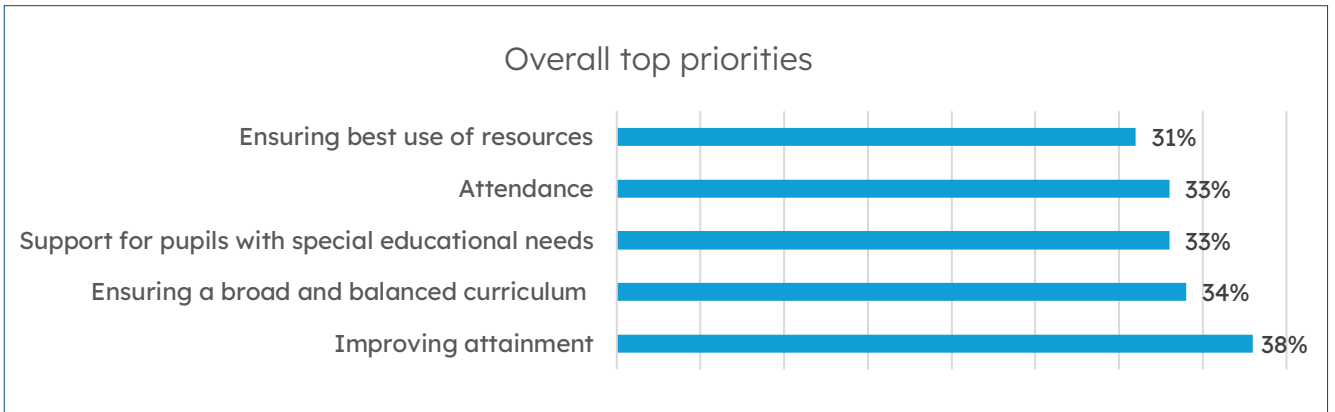


Figure 6, percentage of respondents that identified the areas shown as one of the top priorities for their school or trust

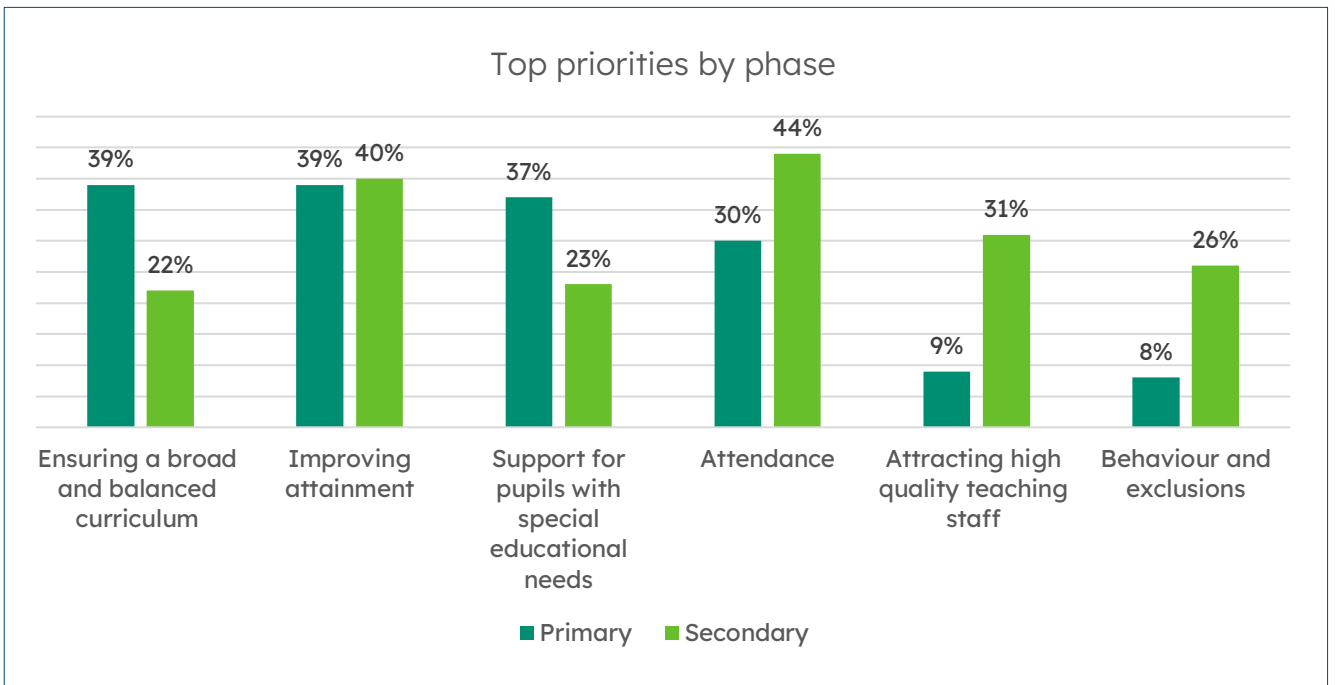


Figure 7, percentage of respondents that identified the areas shown as one of the top three strategic priorities in their school or trust, versus the phase of education

In contrast, primary schools list improving attainment and ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum as the joint top priority at 39% of respondents. This dual focus of two particularly complimentary priorities, viewed alongside respondents’ comments, points to the drive to achieve a balance in being ambitious for pupil academic outcomes while providing a well-rounded offer of nurturing experiences. This was followed by supporting children with SEND (37%), with comments pointing directly to an emphasis on early intervention and inclusive practices.

There were also comments from respondents that indicated many other driving priorities, from Ofsted inspection to MAT growth. There was also some

evidence of disconnect from strategic priorities for those governing at local level in a MAT.

“As a local governor I am not always clear on the strategic priorities of the Board.”

Moreover, the consistent appearance of SEND support and curriculum breadth as top priorities across both phases signals a sector-wide drive to inclusive, well-rounded education. This commitment persists despite the financial and logistical challenges outlined elsewhere in our survey, testament to the resilience and values-driven nature of school governance.

“Again, very difficult to choose 3. The Trust does a good job at looking at all these areas with specialists assigned as applicable including SEND lead, business manager, HR Lead, Lead for attainment etc”

## Finance: declining confidence

Governing boards and their schools and trusts continue to face growing budget pressures, even though per-pupil spending has, according to the DfE, increased above inflation. This is due to expenditure rising at a faster rate, including inflation-related expenses like staff pay and energy bills.

Views and concerns about money are simply the worst they have ever been in the 14 year history of NGA’s survey. The sector now stands at a point where close to two thirds (60%) are saying balancing the budget is the biggest challenge they face. This is up from 40% in 2020, 46% in 2022, and 52% in 2023.

“Budgets are so catastrophically low that we are already cutting staff to remain solvent whilst using previous year surpluses that were built up for other reasons. Like all schools, we are filling the gaps left by savage cuts to local authorities, NHS, social care, SEND, etc.”

Projected pupil numbers (45%) has replaced infrastructure costs (36%) as the third biggest challenge to setting a balanced budget. In addition to this, when asked if school/trust finances have been impacted by falling pupil numbers, 39% of respondents said yes. As would be expected, this was more of a concern for primary schools (45%) than secondary schools (23%). This is the first year we have asked directly about the impact of falling pupil numbers on school finances.

There are regional variations and demographic factors at play here in relation to the extent of the challenge and how new this concern is for schools and trusts. For example, a lack of affordable housing in large cities such as London has been a driver of falling pupil numbers for some years now, as families are pushed into more affordable areas. This will present as a challenge for both primary and secondary phases.

“As primaries we are stuck in a funding crisis created by government: ‘fully-funded’ pay rises which have been 50% or more funded out of existing money.”

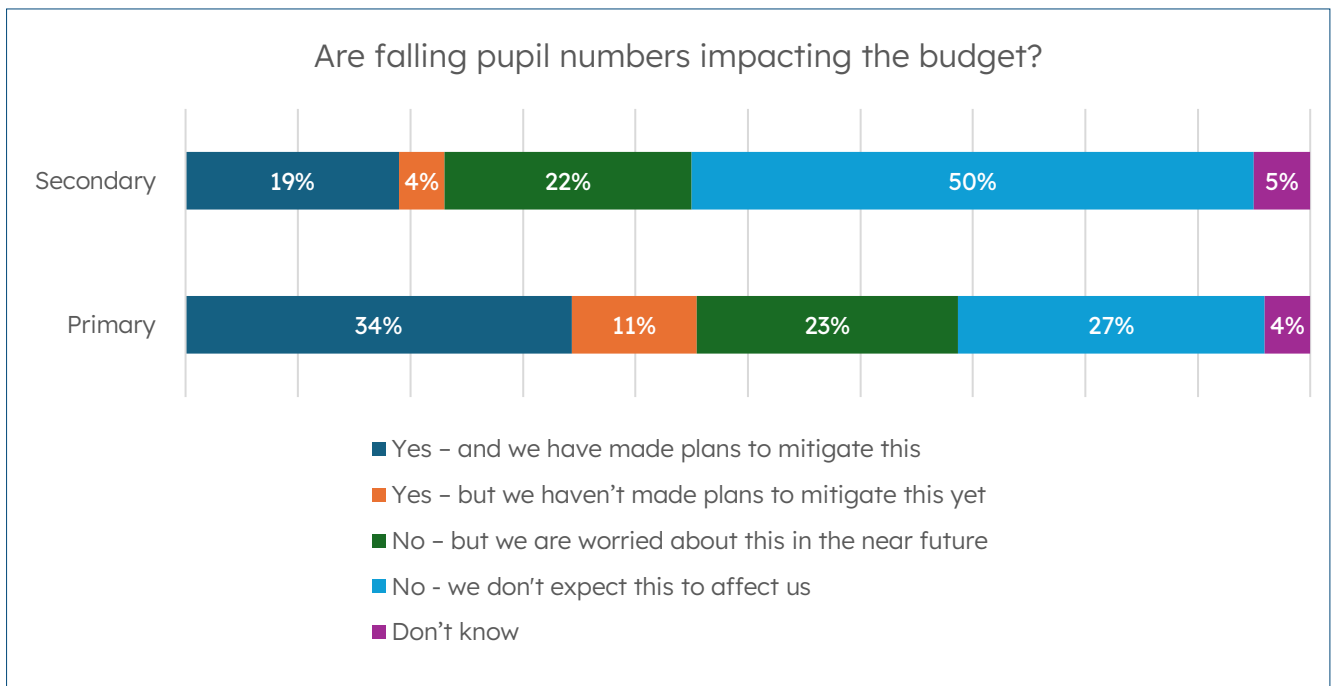


Figure 8, percentage of respondents that report falling pupil numbers as having an impact on setting a balanced budget

However, we are now seeing increasing numbers of respondents across all regions citing falling pupil numbers as one of their top challenges in setting a balanced budget (figure 9), which inevitably lead to a fall in funding levels that will not be levelled out by a fall in costs.

There were slightly fewer respondents reporting that they can retain a healthy surplus (14%). 40% of governing boards state that they are unable to balance income and expenditure or unable to do so without resorting to licensed deficits from local authorities or loans from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). This figure has risen sharply from 24% in 2021.

When examined by the projections in the medium to long term, a clearer picture of school finances can be seen as those who report their school or trust is financially unsustainable without significant changes has risen by two percentage points since 2023 (34%). However, given variation in school structures, demographic and regional differences, phase, and demand for school places, funding shortfalls in the education sector are not evenly distributed. And we see this reflected in this year’s survey results.

Those governing in maintained schools appear to be facing the greatest challenge with balancing the budget (46%), compared to 29% of MAT trustees,

which may partly be explained by far more primaries being maintained schools compared to secondaries, and falling pupil numbers having a more significant impact financially on these schools.

Staff pay costs (64%) remain the most significant challenge for boards when setting a balanced budget, despite last year’s ‘funded’ pay increases from the government. This issue spans across all school types and most phases. However, while funding staff pay is a major concern for primary and nursery schools, their greatest challenge in balancing the budget is the cost of supporting pupils with SEND.

“Financial implications due to the gap between admitting a child with SEN and obtaining full funding. This gap in funding is met by the school without any compensation. With several SEN pupils the financial shortfall severely impacts the budget.”

The rising cost of supporting pupils with SEND and high needs is becoming an increasing challenge for boards, with 60% of respondents identifying this as a growing issue when setting a balanced budget, up from 47% in 2022. Respondents mentioned the financial strain of being a school that welcomes and supports all children, regardless of need, highlighting the financial gap between accepting pupils with SEND and the funding received.

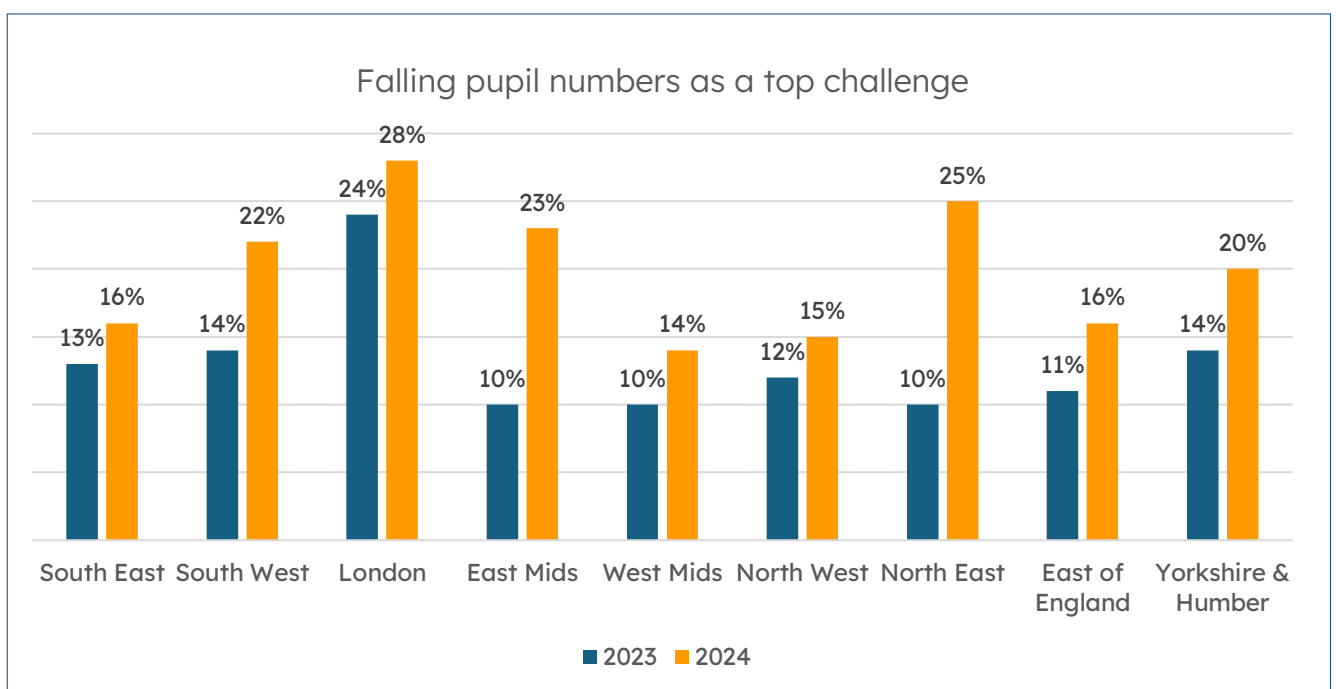


Figure 9, percentage of respondents citing falling pupil numbers as a top challenge across different regions and years (2023 and 2024)





“Supporting children with SEN is a significant drain on resources since we welcome all to our school and have been at pains to accommodate significant needs. Only one pupil is fully funded for this support, and each pupil with SEN leaves the school paying extra to support them, hence impoverishing the experience of all pupils below the expected level of resourcing.”

Looking ahead, boards are increasingly pessimistic about their financial future. When asked about their medium to long-term (3 to 5 years) financial position, only 59% of respondents believed they were financially sustainable, and 40% of those said this was contingent on making efficiency savings or using unspent funds.

This decline in financial confidence was consistent across all board types, with maintained schools faring the worst – only 52% reported financial sustainability, down from 56% last year. While MAT trustees continue to have a more optimistic outlook than other board types, only 69% believed they were financially sustainable over the next 3 to 5 years, down from 77% last year.

Those governing in primary schools were significantly less confident about their financial future than those governing in other phases, with only 54% considering their financial position sustainable over the next 3 to 5 years – 38% of whom said sustainability would depend on making efficiency savings or using reserves.

	MAT		LGB		Maintained		SAT	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
We are financially sustainable with current levels of funding and income	25%	28%	24%	20%	15%	15%	30%	23%
We are financially sustainable with efficiency savings and drawing on unspent funds	52%	41%	52%	42%	41%	37%	51%	45%
We are financially unsustainable without significant changes	23%	21%	24%	22%	44%	43%	19%	26%

Table 5, percentage of respondents reporting financial sustainability (2023 and 2024 responses)

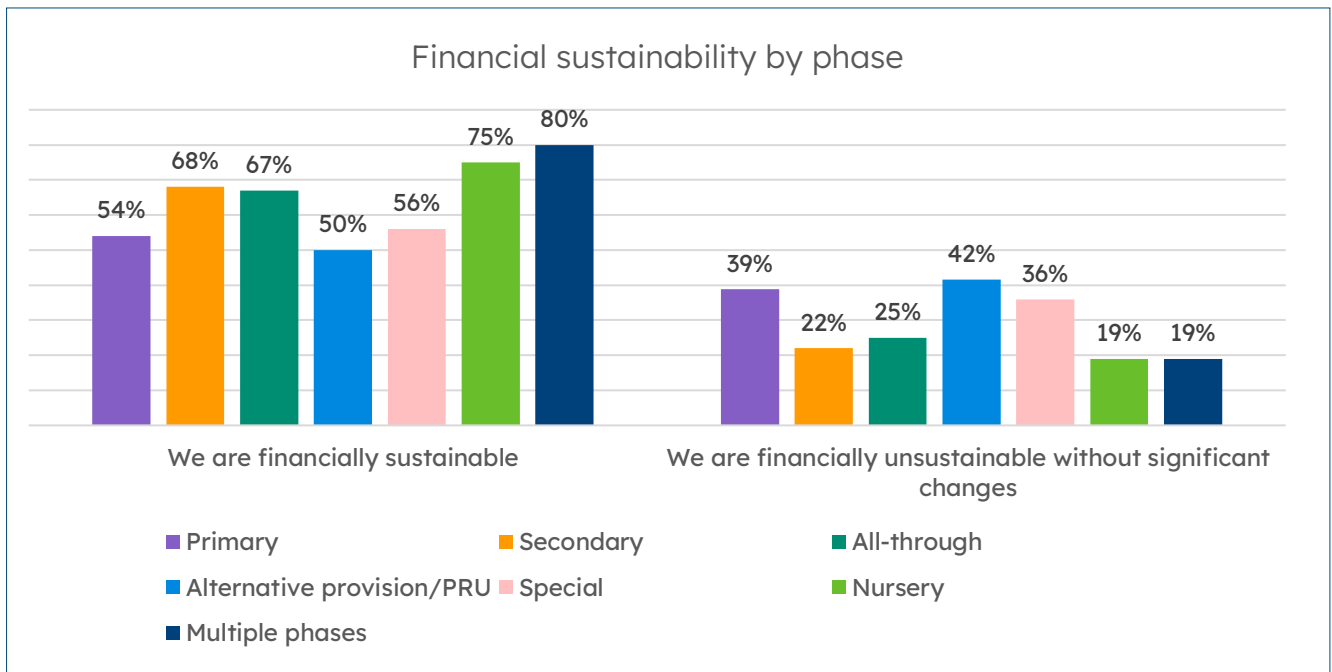


Figure 10, percentage of respondents reporting on their current financial sustainability (sustainable with current funding or with savings or unsustainable without significant changes), shown by phase of education

Although nursery and primary schools share similar financial challenges, nursery schools had the highest number of respondents (75%) out of all phases stating they are financially sustainable. While this is significant, far fewer survey respondents governed in a nursery setting in comparison to other phases. Respondents' comments suggest this confidence is due to the increasing number of government-funded nursery places available.

## Implications for boards and leaders

The escalating financial crisis demands urgent attention from governing boards and school and trust leaders. While responses emphasise that this issue can only be rectified in its entirety through increased funding, respondents' comments offer a number of practical and immediate actions that many boards and their organisations are pursuing:

“These measures to ensure sustainability are driven by just that, a very real need and means to be sustainable despite government funding. We should have the funding and freedom to be able to deliver against our primary goal, ... ensuring all our children have access to the best possible education for them... it is achievable but at present through innovation that places stress on the professionals we need to retain to help us deliver that aim... we should work collegiately to ensure we remove that pressure.”

- **Rigorous budget scrutiny** – conduct a comprehensive review of how budget projections are made, gain external advice on all expenditure and identify potential areas for savings and efficiencies.
- **Strategic resource allocation** – prioritise spending on essential educational needs, ensuring that cuts do not disproportionately impact vulnerable pupils or critical programs.
- **Collaboration and advocacy** – increase community-based partnerships and collaboration with other local schools (including between schools in trusts) and stakeholders to both lobby for increased funding and explore ways to distribute resource allocation and facilities.
- **Financial transparency** – communicate openly with staff, parents, and the community about the financial challenges faced by the school and the steps being taken to address them.

Survey respondents also discussed long-term solutions required for a systemic approach:

- **A sustainable funding model** – a model that adequately reflects the rising costs of education and provides equitable resources for all schools.
- **Targeted support** – ensure that schools facing specific financial challenges, such as those with high proportions of pupils with SEND, receive targeted support and additional funding.
- **Financial skills development** – invest in professional development opportunities for both school and trust leaders and governing boards to enhance their financial management skills and decision-making capabilities.

While the tone of the responses suggests an overall pessimistic view, it was remarkable that even against such a concerning backdrop, respondents wanted to proactively address the financial crisis on behalf of the system as a whole.

“Through implementation of an innovative federated MNS [maintained nursery school] model with LA support we are able to generate a balanced and improving budget to support an outstanding executive team, my view not OFSTEDs, despite the continuing pressures and issues of lack of appropriate funding for MNSs”.

The responses also show the undeterred drive of boards and leaders to protect the quality of education for all children and young people. Most boards appeared to have taken account of the warning signs of recent years and had already started to proactively address the situation in the absence of any renewed funding pledges. Yet none of this removes the common anxiety that the problem is being exacerbated, not solved centrally, with many respondents being fearful of further cuts alongside the implications of staff shortages, and a decline in educational outcomes.

## Staff recruitment and retention

Schools and trusts continue to try to address issues related to teachers’ workload and mental health. [The latest data indicates](#) that many teachers are working 54 hours a week to manage their workload, prompting an increased focus by schools on improving their staff’s mental health and work-life balance.

“We have put in place a working party across staff roles with leadership and governance involved”

In 2023, the government announced that they were going to reduce teachers’ working hours by five per week within three years. However, teachers’ hours actually increased in 2022/23 compared to the previous year, making this target much more challenging. While the DfE did pursue a workload reduction taskforce this year – in which NGA participated – it did not report before the general election was called.

“As well-being resilience governor I visit at least once a month (schedule is published) to be available for staff and children. We have a confidential well-being email address.”

We know this is an issue that governors and trustees care deeply about, not least because it is the responsibility of the governing board to support the wellbeing of all staff employed in their school or trust, including their work-life balance. Worryingly, a number of responses indicated increased cases of financial stress among staff and were exploring options for providing assistance beyond pay.

“Food Bank” cupboard for staff (Large number of support staff) CPD on wellbeing. Exercise classes”

The majority of governing boards (83%) are systematically monitoring and addressing issues relating to the workload, wellbeing and work-life balance of staff – up from 71% in 2020 when we first asked the question. Addressing these concerns remains the most frequently cited staffing challenge, with 45% of respondents identifying it as one of their top three. While this shows a positive movement, there are still questions as to why this figure remains some distance from 100%.

When asked to select their three biggest challenges in relation to staffing, boards were most likely to consider addressing workload and wellbeing (45%) followed by recruitment (41%) and maintaining the current staff structure (38%).

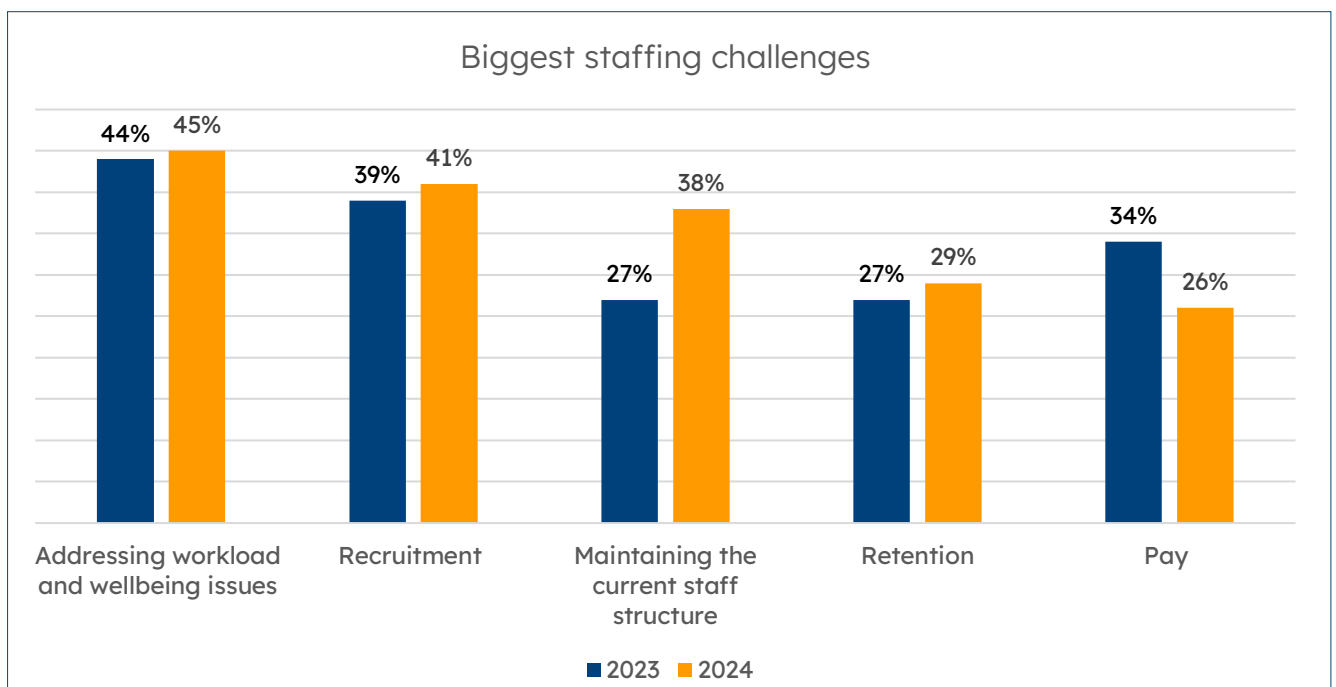


Figure 11, percentage of respondents indicating the areas shown as one of their biggest staffing challenges (shown over two years)

This year, some governors and trustees also spoke about the heavy burden of workload and compromised wellbeing on current staff retention, with one stating:

“There is too much external pressure to do things and threats of being a failure if you do not do them teachers are a punchbag”.

Support from line managers (58%) was the most commonly cited method that schools and trusts use to improve staff wellbeing. Almost half (49%) reported that reducing unnecessary workload was a priority, followed by pastoral support and counselling (46%).

While workload and wellbeing were the biggest overall challenge, there was significant variation by phase. Recruitment (66%) and retention (43%) were the biggest challenges cited by those governing in secondary schools compared to 28% and 22% respectively for primary schools.

Maintaining the current staff structure was the second highest challenge for those governing in primary schools (45%), compared to only 23% in secondary schools. Again, this reflects falling pupil rolls, with [recent data](#) indicating that the incoming reception cohort is around 10% smaller than year 6 cohorts. This reduction decreases the need for primary teachers overall, leading some schools to merge classes or increase the teaching hours of senior leaders to manage the corresponding decrease in funding.

Support staff (34%) and teaching staff (32%) are cited by governing boards as the hardest positions to recruit for and retain, with boards concerned about the lack of suitable applicants and not being able to offer competitive pay and benefits. In secondary schools this was a much bigger challenge, with 63% of respondents identifying recruiting and retaining teaching staff as their hardest position to recruit for, compared to 20% of those governing in primary schools. This is up from 50% (retention) and 54% (recruitment) last year when we asked the question slightly differently.

## Implications for boards and leaders

Responses showed that boards benefit from regularly reviewing staff wellbeing in relation to retention, with a focus on securing a sustainable and supportive workplace. This was shown to not only benefit staff but also improve the overall quality of education for

pupils, with a number of respondents saying this led to teachers feeling valued and supported and more likely to be engaged and effective in their roles.

“The school has a Wellbeing offer for counselling, gym membership. Designated Staff and Governor for Well-being. Staff wellbeing group in place. Mutual support.”

When asked to expand on the methods boards use to improve staff wellbeing there were a range of strategies:

- **Having a mix of staff trained** as mental health first aiders, from senior leaders to teachers and support staff.
- **Regular workload reviews** – evaluating changing needs and whether there is a need for additional staff as well as offering flexibility in relation to family issues and cover for absence.
- **Wellbeing initiatives** that proactively foster a supportive school culture, offering resources like mental health support, flexible work arrangements, and opportunities for professional development.
- **Recruitment and retention** strategies that include competitive compensation packages, investment in professional development opportunities, and fostering a positive school culture that attracts and retains talented staff.
- **Strategic staffing approaches** – adapting staffing structures to align with changing pupil numbers, ensuring equitable workloads and maintaining educational quality.
- **Engaging with staff, unions, and other stakeholders** to develop collaborative solutions that address the root causes of workload and wellbeing challenges.

“Staff initiatives - “wellbeing fairy” - looking out for each other, offering specific support or thanks”

Despite many positive approaches, there was also sometimes a disconnect appearing between what boards knew and what leaders were delivering. Another issue that was mentioned several times was local governors in MATs not always being clear what the trust overall was offering.

“Again, this is not directly something I am involved with. I believe these to be areas the Trust is proud to offer”



## SEND provision: a strained system

The survey underscores the persistent challenges plaguing SEND provision in England. Despite the best efforts of many schools and trust boards, leaders and staff, the system is hampered by inadequate funding, staff shortages, and inconsistent support services. Even schools with well-developed SEND systems find themselves constrained by a lack of resources.

“The only way schools can support pupils with SEND better is with additional funding. We need to be able to access expertise, but we also need proper funding for SEND and the associated services outside school – at the moment, we can only support SEND by diverting funding from other children.”

The survey results consistently underscored the strength of feeling that this is the case – SEND provision is highly inconsistent, full of significant disparities in the quality and availability of support services and, in places, at risk of collapse.

“With an excellent SENCO leader and support staff we attract children with SEND which in itself is good it puts added pressure on finances and staffing as the funding available usually does not cover the costs involved.”

Respondents described challenges relating to SEND provision in various ways:

- **Funding** – access to adequate funding remains the top challenge for 74% of governing boards, highlighting the urgency for reform.
- **Local authority support** – 58% of respondents cited dwindling resources and increased strain on local authorities as a major obstacle.
- **EHC plans** – obtaining Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans remains a significant hurdle for 55% of respondents.
- **Staffing** – recruiting and retaining qualified support staff is a pressing issue, particularly for special schools.

It is significant that access to funding was reported by three quarters of governing boards (74%) as the top challenge in relation to supporting pupils with SEND – this is up from 66% the previous year. Interestingly, secondary school boards were actually more likely to pick engagement with local authorities (62%) over access to funding (61%). There was no significant difference by board type. The depleting resources and

increasing strain on local authorities and wider services was clearly something that played heavily on a large number of respondents’ minds.

There was also some regional disparity when examining respondents’ top challenges overall, with the East of England more likely to select supporting pupils with special educational needs (42%) compared to the East Midlands (29%), with all other regions falling in between.

There were also worries that the issue has far wider consequences and does not just impact those with immediate SEND needs.

“There are no spaces, the school is struggling financially, and staff wellbeing and other pupils’ wellbeing and attainment are being affected. Parents determination to keep high needs pupils in mainstream schools where needs cannot be met, and specialist staff are not available is meaning capacity is then diverted away from majority of pupils.”

Special schools will inherently rely on additional support staff more than mainstream settings due to the complex needs of their pupils. Reflecting broader recruitment challenges, appointing support staff was cited as one of their top three challenges in relation to SEND (32%).

“We have put a lot of effort [into] this because it is significant for us. And have had significant and broadly supportive contact with our main local authority partner. We are well placed with skilled staff. We believe we need to do what we do. But it costs more than we get to do it and funding limits what we can do.”

This year, we asked governing boards to pick three initiatives listed in the SEND green paper that they think will make the most difference. Unsurprisingly, of those who had read the green paper, funding reform was the most commonly cited initiative (74%), followed by new national SEND standards (48%), and digital standardised EHCPs (48%).

Not all respondents were optimistic about the proposals put forward in the green paper, with some respondents highlighting that whilst wider services are underfunded and there is inconsistency with the support offered by schools, the initiatives will make little difference.

“None of those will make the tiniest bit of difference while basic services are so very poor. Our children are waiting months or years for referrals/EHCP assessments, and the local authority are clearly gatekeeping their limited resources by knocking back attempts to access services at every opportunity. It’s not entirely their fault, they have no money, but the myth that schools can get external support is very damaging.”

## Implications for boards and leaders

Survey results showed that navigating the complex SEND landscape requires boards and leaders to:

- **Advocate for resources, locally and nationally** – the number one concern was that the sector simply needs to lobby for increased funding and equitable resource allocation to ensure all pupils with SEND receive the support they need.
- **Collaborate with stakeholders** – many respondents spoke of the power of partnerships; with local authorities, health services, and other schools working to develop a cohesive and coordinated approach to SEND provision.
- **Prioritise staff training** – investing in professional development opportunities for staff to enhance their understanding of SEND needs was shown to be pivotal to success.
- **Foster inclusive environments** – respondents pointed to co-creation, with leaders of schools and trusts developing cultures that embrace diversity and value the contributions of all pupils, regardless of their individual needs.
- **Engage with families** – establishing open communication channels with parents and carers was both a major challenge but key strategy of success, ensuring their voices are heard and their concerns addressed.

“Schools in local areas need to share the number of pupils with SEND more equally to manage the pressures on budgets and the wider school.”

By addressing these challenges head-on, school leaders can play a crucial role in improving the lives of pupils with SEND and ensuring their full participation in education. While systemic change is necessary, individual schools can make a significant difference

by prioritising SEND provision and advocating for the resources and support needed to create a truly inclusive educational environment.

## Safeguarding: increasing concerns

Protecting the most vulnerable pupils and ensuring every child feels safe and valued within their school community is of paramount importance to governing boards. While this has always been the case, we know that rising safeguarding concerns during and since the COVID-19 pandemic have been a significant concern for boards and the schools and trusts they govern in. Worryingly, the rise in safeguarding concerns NGA has reported from the last two years shows no real sign of stopping.

“We are receiving more and more children suffering from trauma, sexual, physical and emotional abuse”

Nearly half (49%) of respondents overall reported an increase in safeguarding concerns this year. 47% of respondents said that safeguarding concerns had remained the same and only 4% reported a decrease. Those governing in secondary schools were, however, more likely to report an increase (55%) than those governing in primary schools (47%). The North East was the region where increased safeguarding concerns were the highest (54%).

While the overall trend shows continued growth in safeguarding concerns, the rate at which concerns are rising year on year is slowing. Respondents reported a 49% increase in 2024, compared to 55% in 2023. 71% of respondents said they had seen a rise in safeguarding concerns in 2022 following the COVID-19 pandemic.

“While some issues are long standing, criminal exploitation/gang problems have risen sharply in local communities. Drugs and shoplifting in particular”

When we explored the reasons for the concerns, bullying and cyber-bullying (64%) remained the most prominent, as they were in 2023, followed by neglect (48%) and domestic abuse (41%) as the most commonly reported safeguarding priorities for boards. The categories selected showed no variation across regions.

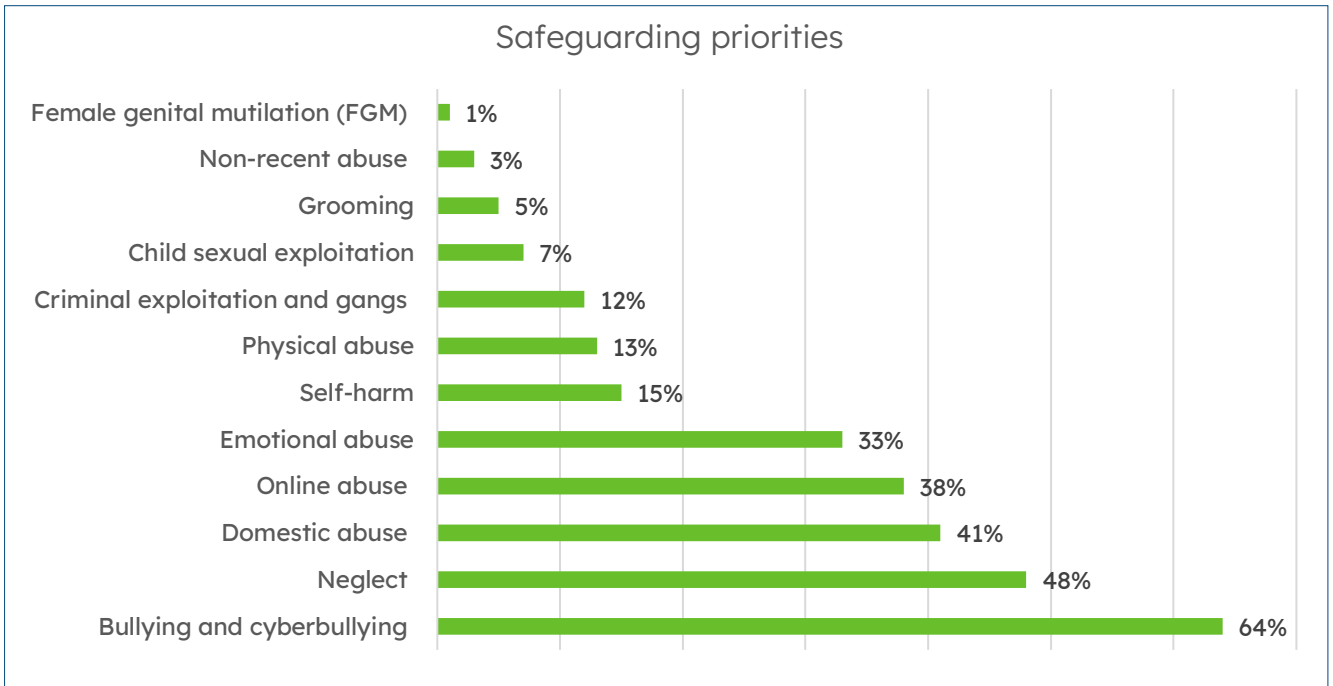


Figure 12, reported key safeguarding priorities

Both online abuse and emotional abuse were reported as more prevalent in MATs and SATs. Online abuse and self-harm were also far more prevalent in secondaries, as the top second and third choice respectively.

“Almost all categories of Safeguarding issues are rising year on year”

Self-harm at 15% was a new option added this year on the basis of feedback last year which reported this as an increasingly common concern. There were also a number of responses that indicated that increased challenges parents were facing raising their children was a contributing factor.

“Poor parenting is an issue & school staff have to spend time on toilet training with children at an age when this should not have to be done”.

## Implications for boards and leaders

Escalating safeguarding challenges demand a comprehensive and proactive response from school leaders. Key actions include:

- **Robust safeguarding policies** – review and strengthen existing safeguarding policies to ensure they are comprehensive, up-to-date, and aligned with current best practices.

- **Staff training and awareness** – provide regular and comprehensive training for all staff on recognising and responding to safeguarding concerns. Foster a culture of vigilance and open communication.
- **Targeted support** – develop targeted interventions for pupils identified as at risk, such as counselling, mentoring, and access to specialist services.
- **Collaboration with external agencies** – establish strong partnerships with local authorities, social services, and other relevant agencies to ensure a coordinated and effective response to safeguarding concerns.
- **Prevention and early intervention** – implement proactive measures to prevent safeguarding issues from arising, such as anti-bullying programs, mental health support, and education on healthy relationships.
- **Data-driven decision making** – evaluate data on safeguarding incidents to identify trends, assess the effectiveness of interventions, and inform future strategies.

“Many children are arriving with difficult family circumstances which did not arise in families in the area we used to serve ... there are problems with neglect and poor understanding of risks to children’s well-being and safety from physical, emotional and other harms within the families’ environment. Families are unable to manage their own circumstances. We are helping fifty families out of a school population of 400”

Responses indicate that the prioritisation of safeguarding and investing in comprehensive prevention and support systems is set to be a major point of discussion for boards for a significant time. Positively, many boards still carried optimism that they can create a safer and more nurturing environment for all pupils against the odds. This will not only protect vulnerable children but also contribute to a positive school culture where everyone feels valued, respected, and supported.

## Extended services: schools bridging the gap

In recent years, schools and trusts have increasingly been dubbed the ‘4th emergency service’ as they step in to plug the gaps of diminishing and underfunded wider services, addressing the needs of a rapidly growing number of families falling into poverty. The vital support provided to pupils and their families often includes additional services that go beyond schools’ educational responsibilities.

“Our head teacher has had to help with organising parents for a court hearing, shopped and bought fuel for a family.”

“We support parents with reminders and transport to medical appointments where relevant to support children”

This year, a staggering 51% of respondents reported an increase in the additional support they offer pupils and their families. In line with previous years, pre-loved or second-hand uniform provision (75%), wraparound before and after school care (62%) and breakfast provision (52%) were the top three services offered to pupils.

### “Staff often taking pupils into school”

Most regions recorded similar figures to the overall 51%, with the one exception being the North East with 60% recording an increase, followed by the North West at 55%, with the South East, the lowest region recording an increase (47%). SATs were the least likely board type to record an increase at 45%, followed by the local tier at 47%, maintained boards at 52%, compared to MATs being the highest at 56%. Boards that viewed themselves as the most financially sustainable were also the least likely to record an increase.

As would be expected, primary schools are much more likely to offer wraparound care (77%). In contrast, secondary schools are more likely to provide financial support for purchasing uniforms (42%), compared to just 22% of primary schools.

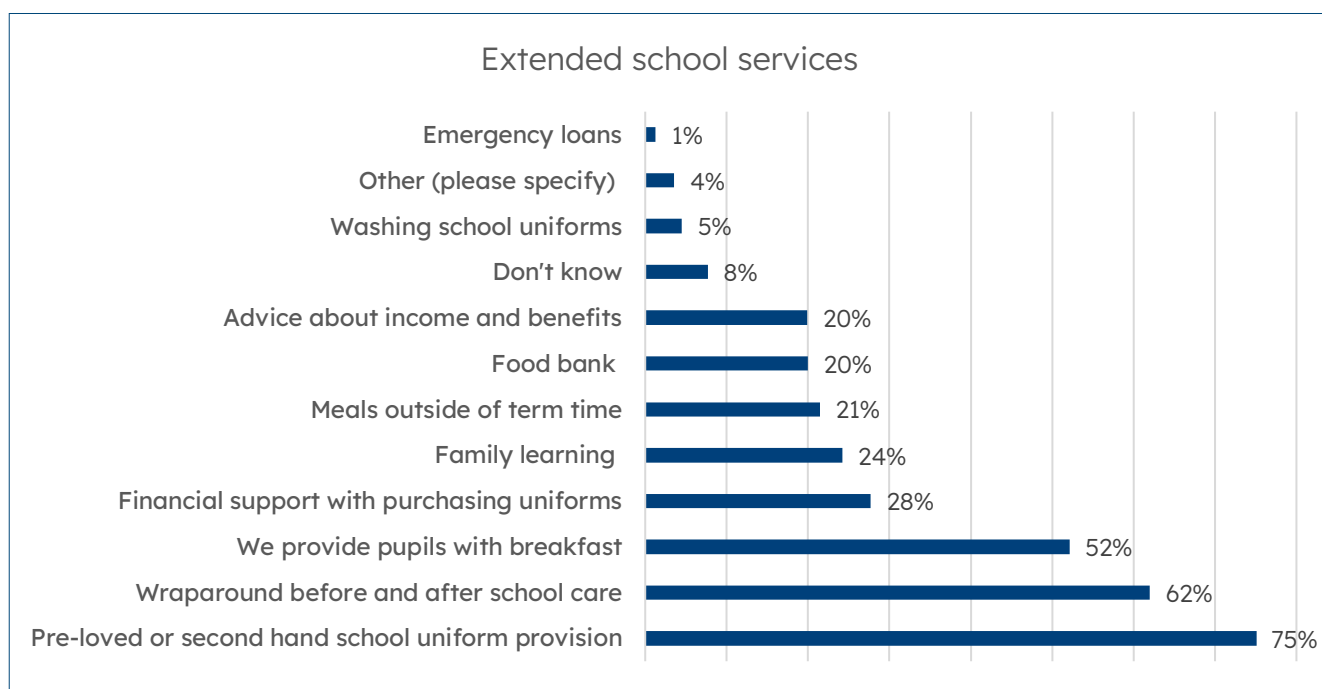


Figure 13, most commonly reported additional services provided by schools/trusts



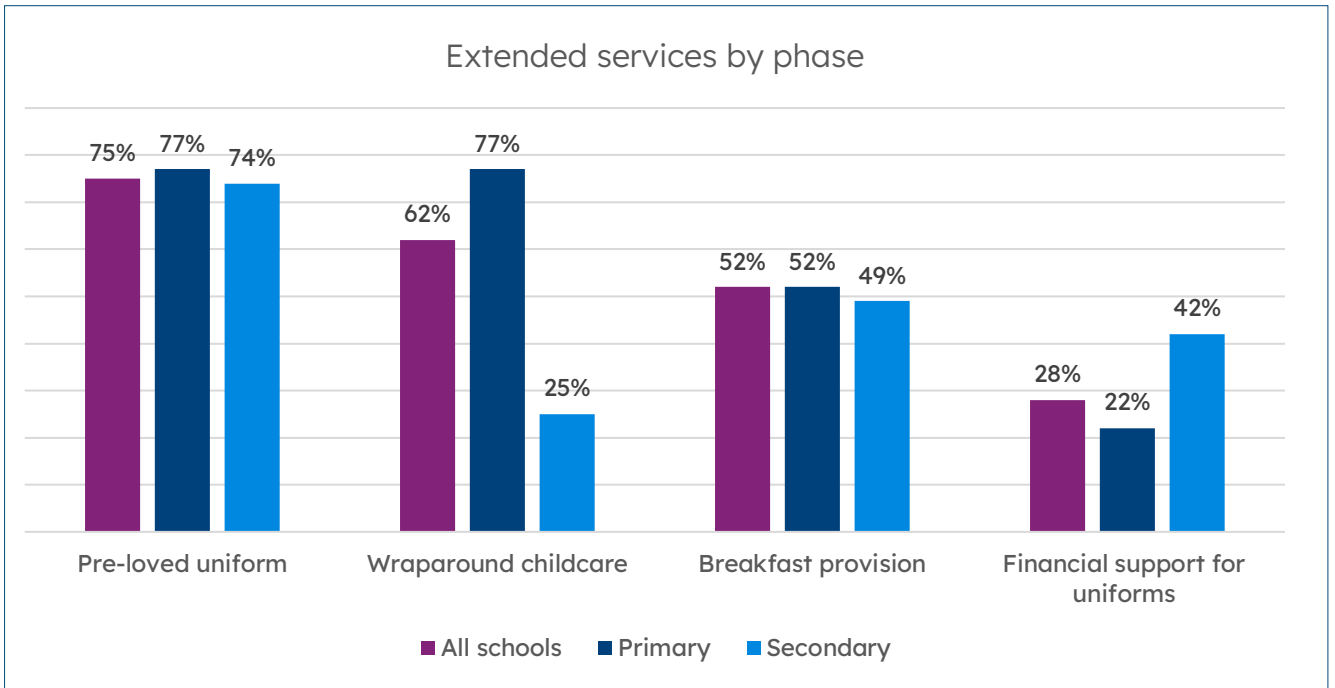


Figure 14, most commonly reported additional services provided by schools/trusts (shown according to phase of education)

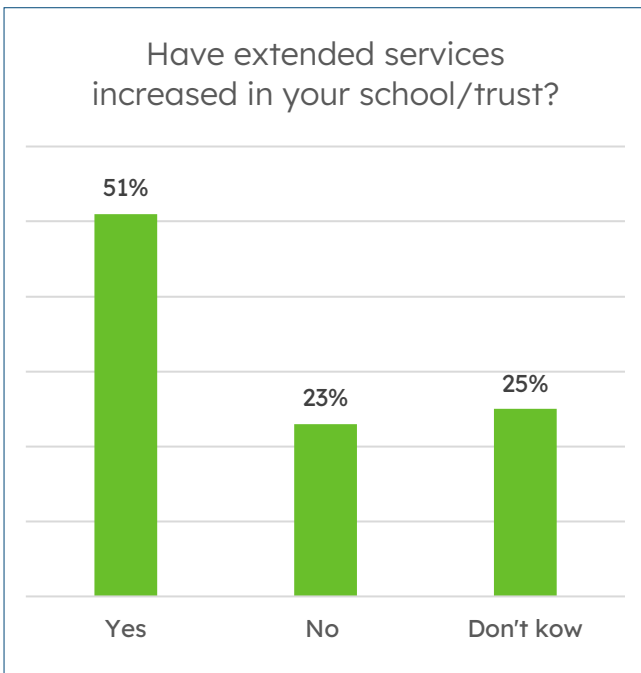


Figure 15, percentage of respondents indicating an increase in additional services provided by their school/trust in the last 12 months

### Implications for boards and leaders

Rising demand for additional support services presents both challenges and opportunities:

- **Resource allocation** – boards need to carefully allocate resources to meet the growing demand for support services, ensuring that these services do not detract from their core educational mission.
- **Partnerships** – building partnerships with community organisations, charities, businesses and local authorities can help schools and trusts access additional resources and expertise to provide effective support.
- **Peer support and joint training** – equipping staff with the skills and knowledge to address the complex needs of pupils and families is potentially more feasible by coordinating efforts with other schools and trusts.
- **Advocacy** – boards can play a vital role in advocating for policies and funding that address the root causes of poverty and inequality, reducing the need for schools to act as the ‘fourth emergency service.’

“The school offers wider support to families on an individual basis e.g. buying a microwave for a family with no cooking facilities; a bed for another pupil etc.”

By embracing their role as community hubs and working collaboratively with other stakeholders, schools can make a significant difference in the lives of their pupils and families, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive. Respondents' comments make clear that while some consider this a challenge schools shouldn't have to deal with, all appear to accept the challenge, placing their school or trust at the very heart of meeting wider societal needs.

“... no child ever misses out on school trips or treats for financial reasons. Items of uniform or shoes will be purchased for pupils if required.”

## School attendance: modest improvements

“We have extensively used all of the methods listed and seen little or no difference despite the heroic efforts of all staff to get and keep students in school”

This academic year, school attendance rates in England have shown modest improvement compared to the previous year according to DfE data, with overall rates rising by a few percentage points. However, challenges with persistent absenteeism remain and this continues to be both a top challenge for boards and one of the top strategic priorities cited in this year's survey.

“Attendance is improving slightly but persistent absence hard to tackle”.

The survey highlights the following key findings:

- **Communication with parents** – the most successful method for improving attendance, cited by 81% of respondents, is open communication and providing guidance to parents.
- **Targeted support** – 54% of respondents found targeted support meetings to be effective in addressing attendance issues.
- **Additional strategies** – other successful strategies include attendance awards (43%), multi-agency support for families (42%), and breakfast clubs (33%).

“We cannot afford dedicated attendance officers, so must utilise extant teaching and admin staff over and above their normal duties”

## Implications for boards and leaders

Respondents' comments pointed to both the continued challenge of persistent absenteeism but also the need for a multi-faceted approach from school leaders and boards working collectively:

“Rewards motivating pupils. Attendance has improved significantly. Going to introduce governor awards for attendance.”

- **Strengthen communication** – prioritise open and regular communication with parents, offering guidance and support to address barriers to attendance.
- **Targeted interventions** – develop personalised interventions for pupils with persistent absenteeism, such as mentoring programs, counselling, or academic support.
- **Collaboration** – building partnerships across the community and wider society wherever viable. Particularly building strong rapport with families, social services, and other agencies were shown to be key to providing comprehensive support for pupils facing challenges outside of school.
- **Positive reinforcement** – implement attendance rewards and recognition programs to incentivise good attendance and create a positive school culture.
- **Data-driven decision making** – track attendance data to identify trends, assess the effectiveness of interventions, and inform future strategies.

“Considering community-based measures such as a “walking bus.”

While the challenge voiced by respondents clearly shows no signs of disappearing, responses also pointed to positive outcomes of adopting a proactive and holistic approach to attendance, with clear messaging to both pupils and parents that the organisation is committed to them having the opportunity to fully engage in their education and reach their full potential.

“Our attendance has been pretty strong largely because of ongoing proactive senior staff contact with parents - communication and trust is key”.

## Curriculum breadth: under threat

“We teach swimming in only one year group (Y4) and our offerings of school clubs are significantly reduced because of teacher workload, but we have stoutly resisted the temptation to reduce teaching of any of our intended curriculum.”

While delivering a broad and balanced curriculum is a top strategic priority for governing boards, a worrying 59% of respondents have reported reducing the teaching of or cutting certain subjects due to budget constraints.

Over a quarter of respondents (27%) cited a lack of qualified teachers as the top challenge for schools and trusts in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. Many respondents specifically mentioned difficulties in recruiting staff for sciences, computing, food, and design technology.

18% of respondents said that a lack of time was a challenge when delivering a broad and balanced curriculum, with some respondents reporting that their school or trust is spending more time on core subjects in a bid to raise attainment.

“We have maintained our curriculum to date but are likely to need to make changes to help address the budget deficit.”

There was, however, variation by phase: 53% of those governing in secondary schools identified a lack of qualified teachers as the biggest challenge, while 63% of primary school governors cited budget constraints as a greater issue. Time constraints were also less of an issue for those governing in secondary schools (12%) when compared to primary schools (24%).

Among respondents governing secondary schools, including those with sixth forms, 14% mentioned other challenges, with a significant number noting that not enough pupils opted to take certain subjects to make delivery viable.

Those governing in maintained schools (62%) were significantly more likely to consider budget constraints a challenge to delivering a broad and balanced curriculum than their SAT (42%) counterparts and slightly more than MAT trustees (57%). They were, however, less likely to consider a lack of qualified teachers as a challenge (17%) than MAT (37%) and SAT (42%) governing boards.

There were many other issues, considerations and strategies discussed in respondents' comments around the curriculum, revealing a rich tapestry of challenges boards are addressing in delivering teaching and learning:

“... now that we have successfully completed an Ofsted inspection we can deliver a curriculum more suited to the needs of the pupils”

“Due to overcrowding of the building (double number of pupils from when school was built) DT subjects have lost all their rooms, eg art, music, library, cookery ...”

“Within the sixth form some subjects don't have sufficient take up, in some cases these subjects are removed from student choice after careful consideration.”

“To try and raise attainment we are looking at reducing time spent on non-core subjects so more core subject time can be given.”

“We have not cut or curtailed any subjects but are finding it more difficult to recruit teachers in the Sciences and Maths.”

“At present no changes however we've been advised that pupil numbers are falling in the area so will look closely at this.”

“Lack of government approved qualification - courses no longer getting a qualification at the end.”

“Enrichment activities such as trips have been reduced.”

## Implications for boards and leaders

Many respondents acknowledged that the erosion of curriculum breadth demands urgent attention. Key actions recorded included:

- **Advocacy** – many respondents pointed to the need to advocate for increased funding and fairer resource allocation as the only sustainable answer to ensure a comprehensive and fulfilling curriculum.
- **Creative solutions** – despite the funding challenge, many respondents emphasised innovative approaches to overcome staffing shortages, such as sharing resources with other schools, offering flexible working arrangements, and investing in teacher training and development.

- **Curriculum review** – regular reviews of the curriculum to ensure it remains relevant, engaging, and aligned with pupil needs and interests had become normal practice for many boards.
- **Data-driven decision making** – there were mixed views on data, with some boards being unclear what was needed while others pointed specifically to data on pupil enrolment, subject uptake and outcomes, and teacher availability to inform curriculum decisions and resource allocation.
- **Collaboration** – a number of boards said the biggest impact was through collaboration with other schools and trusts, subject associations, and teacher training providers to develop shared solutions and address systemic challenges.

“we’ve reassessed our curriculum and reprioritised based on what our children need – more choice of subjects”

The detailed feedback showed that through prioritising a focus on curriculum breadth while simultaneously addressing the underlying challenges, boards and leaders were in a better position to ensure that pupils retained access to a rich and diverse educational experience, preparing them for success in a rapidly changing world.

## Careers: integration and engagement

It is 10 years since the Gatsby Benchmarks were introduced to improve careers education for pupils. Over the past year, the Gatsby Foundation has been conducting a review to capture the experiences of schools and colleges and their implementation of the Benchmarks. A significant theme that has emerged from the review is the crucial role of leaders and leadership and the importance of integrating careers education into the wider systems and structures in the school.

Nearly two thirds (59%) of secondary school respondents have a link governor/trustee for careers, 54% are receiving regular reports and updates from their headteacher and 36% from their school/trust careers leads. Over half (53%) are aware of their school’s performance against the Gatsby Benchmarks.

While the statutory requirements for careers provision is only applicable to secondary schools, primary

schools still have a crucial role in laying the foundations for future career education and introducing career-related learning. Boards are monitoring this in a variety of ways, including regular reports/updates from the headteacher (43%), monitoring visits (20%) and engagement with parents, staff and pupils (20%).

When asked to expand further, those governing in the primary phase told us about creative ways their schools/trusts are delivering careers education.

“We have visits from career role models to introduce children to careers. For example, we have a scientist who leads science lessons including during British Science Week, we have had trips to nearby work locations including East Midlands Airport and Donnington Park and met various people who talk about their careers.”

“We offer theme weeks and use local employers to visit the children and run workshops.”

## Implications for boards and leaders

The survey results highlight opportunities for further enhancement of careers education:

- **Leadership** – strengthen leadership in careers education by ensuring designated roles and responsibilities, regular communication, and clear accountability mechanisms.
- **Integration** – embed careers education within the wider school curriculum and systems, fostering a holistic approach that connects learning to real-world opportunities.
- **Engagement** – actively involve pupils, parents, and employers in the design and delivery of careers education, ensuring relevance and alignment with local needs.
- **Continuous improvement** – regularly review and evaluate careers provision against the Gatsby Benchmarks, utilising data and feedback to inform continuous improvement efforts.
- **Resource allocation** – ensure sufficient resources, including funding, staffing and professional development are in place to support the delivery of high-quality careers education.

Responses indicate that through prioritising careers education and investing in its development, boards can directly empower pupils to make informed decisions

about their future pathways, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

It is clear from the responses that governors and trustees are monitoring careers in a variety of ways, most likely determining what works best in their context.

## School buildings: continued decline

Recent concerns around reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) highlight longstanding issues with school estate planning and investment. Current measures are primarily reactive, lacking a proactive approach to other critical issues such as asbestos and lead piping removal. Boards have been clear in their responses this year about the negative impact this is having on the learning environment.

This year, 10% of respondents overall told us that managing and improving premises is a top strategic priority. This figure increased to 15% for those governing in SATs. However, further interrogation shows the true extent of the challenge faced by many schools and trusts.

Last year, over a third (37%) of governing boards told us that their school building was not in good condition. This year we wanted to find out more about the impact this is having – nearly half (49%) of respondents agreed that the condition of school buildings is having a negative impact on the learning environment for pupils.

Those who govern in MATs were most likely to strongly agree or agree that the condition of their buildings is negatively impacting the learning environment of pupils (52%). Half of maintained school respondents (50%) and 45% of SAT respondents agreed this was the case.

When asked to provide more detail, respondents not only reported challenges with the state of deteriorating older buildings, but also the poor quality of new buildings and the issues this has presented.

“We have had some catastrophic failures in a new building with inferior fitting and implementation of services management by contractors.”

“It is going to be an increasingly difficult situation as there [is] no money for upkeep, so the environment gets less supportive. Areas that have been regenerated were done by parent volunteers and fundraising - and have had positive impact.”

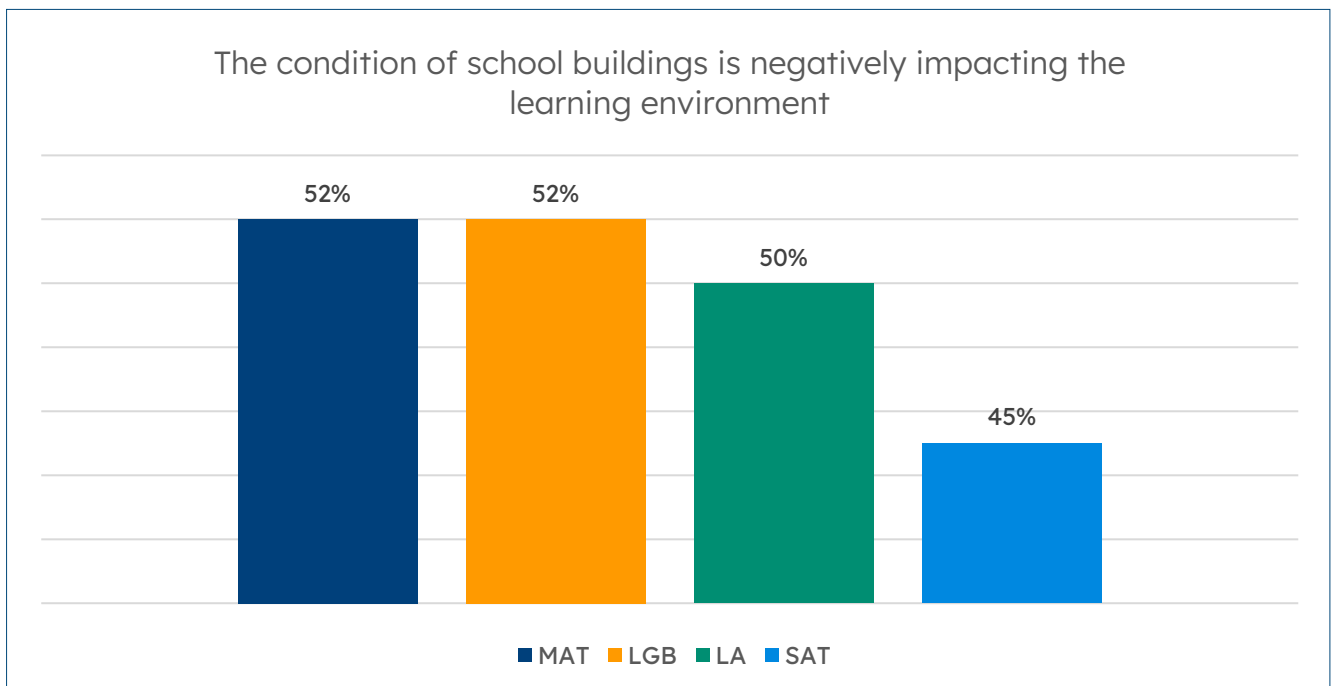


Figure 16, the extent to which respondents agree or strongly agree that school/trust buildings are negatively impacting the learning environment of pupils

## Implications for boards and leaders

The state of school buildings presents a significant challenge for boards and leaders. These were the most prominent points of need and calls to action shared by respondents:

- **DfE need to prioritise maintenance and repairs** – while boards knew they needed to ensure that leaders conduct thorough assessments of school buildings, there were calls for DfE support to help identify and address critical issues that impact the learning environment.
- **Advocate for funding** – there were direct calls for NGA and the sector to lobby specifically for increased funding for school building maintenance and improvements, with many pointing directly to the negative impact of deteriorating facilities not just on learning but also on wellbeing.
- **Explore alternative funding sources** – some respondents said their organisations had already been forced to seek out grants, partnerships, and fundraising opportunities to supplement government funding for building projects.
- **Implement preventive measures** – feedback suggests that boards and leaders are not waiting for funding to arrive, instead they are developing proactive maintenance plans to prevent future deterioration and ensure that buildings are safe, healthy, and conducive to learning.

- **Communicate with stakeholders** – engagement with staff, pupils, parents, and the wider community was reported by several respondents as having an impact, showing that transparency with the school community helps promote the importance of a positive learning environment and the need for investment in school buildings.

Prioritising the maintenance and improvement of school buildings is now firmly at the heart of the agenda for boards and school and trust leaders, with many speaking of this now as an emergency. But the need to invest in the long-term sustainability of school buildings was also recognised, in order to create a more conducive learning environment and enhance pupil wellbeing and educational outcomes. Addressing these issues is not only a matter of fulfilling statutory obligations but also an investment in the future of our children and communities.

## Stakeholder engagement: opportunities to expand

Stakeholder engagement cultivates transparency, trust, and accountability. By actively involving parents, pupils, staff and the wider community in decision-making, boards can ensure that diverse perspectives and needs are considered, leading to more informed and effective governance.

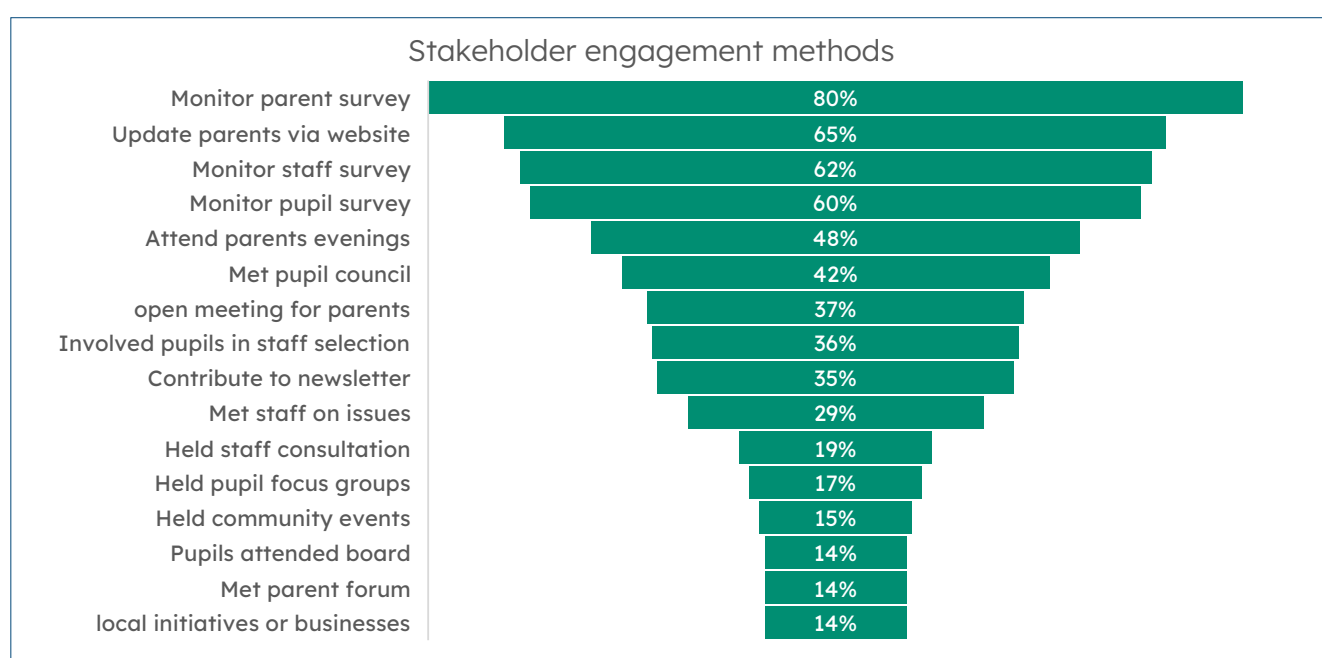



Figure 17, most commonly reported stakeholder engagement methods used by governing boards



The survey reveals that governing boards predominantly rely on traditional methods for stakeholder engagement, with a heavy emphasis on monitoring survey results and digital communication.

This year, survey respondents were asked to select all the strategies their board used to engage with stakeholders. The most common method remains monitoring parent/carer survey results (80%), followed by updating parents via the website (65%) and reviewing staff survey results (62%), while the least common were inviting pupils to attend governing board meetings (14%), meeting with the parent forum/council (14%) and getting involved with local initiatives (14%).

### Engagement methods: respondent examples

There were notable points raised about the challenges with engagement and what boards had achieved:

“Taken part in staff training days & spoken about the Governors role in supporting staff.”

“During governor in school days we take the opportunity to talk to pupils, school council, new members of staff (wellbeing and support) and involve all staff concerning specific issues.”

“One Governor has qualified as a Lead Governor for Mental Health and Well-being and meets termly with a group of staff members”

“School is well engaged with local business and business financial initiatives”

“Offer exit interviews to all teaching staff who leave with Chair of governors”

“Canvassed for opinion of developing and updating our Vision and Values”

“Trustees have some involvement but this is an action plan for us”

“The board has done none of these things”

“Surveys completed but not shared with board”

“Used local press to tell success stories”

“Pupil forum at governors training day”

The most common and least common forms of engagement were consistent across board types. Nursery settings were most likely to engage via updating parents through the website, alternative provision settings via monitoring pupil surveys, while primary, secondary and special school boards used parent surveys.

While these traditional methods offer valuable insights, the low utilisation of less common strategies suggests a missed opportunity for deeper engagement and collaboration with stakeholders.

### Implications for boards and leaders

Respondents' comments underscore the need for school leaders to diversify their stakeholder engagement strategies:

- **Expand engagement methods** – many respondents felt their board needed to explore new, innovative approaches to engagement, with specific suggestions including community focus groups, town hall meetings, and online forums to facilitate dialogue and gather diverse perspectives.
- **Empower pupil voice** – another common theme was the number of respondents saying they wanted to do more on pupil engagement. By actively involving pupils in decision-making processes, some boards had used this to directly inform curriculum development, school policies, or staff selection, to ensure pupil voices are heard and valued.
- **Strengthen parent partnerships** – a few respondents talked about going beyond surveys and website updates to build strong partnerships with parents, offering opportunities for meaningful collaboration and co-creation.
- **Community outreach** – a couple of respondents discussed how they had engaged with local businesses, organisations, and community groups to build relationships, share resources, and foster a sense of shared responsibility for pupil success.
- **Continuous evaluation** – a good number of respondents talked about regularly assessing the effectiveness of engagement strategies, gathering feedback from stakeholders and using data to inform continuous improvement efforts.

By embracing a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement, school and trust boards can build stronger relationships, foster trust, and create a more collaborative and supportive school

community. This will not only enhance the school’s decision-making processes but also contribute to a more positive and enriching learning environment for all.

## Ofsted: a driving force

“You didn’t give OFSTED inspection outcomes as a priority. If you had, I would have tried to select it three times as this appears to be the driver of all decision making centrally. It’s all about OFSTED.”

“OFSTED is not seen by the stakeholders to be the effective force it used to be.”

Our survey results reveal a stark reality: Ofsted wields significant influence over school practices in England. Over half of the respondents (51%) identified Ofsted as the single biggest factor shaping practice within their school or trust. This finding underscores the profound impact of the inspection framework on system culture, day-to-day operations and strategic decisions made by school leaders and educators.

“We are a school that looks after the students, education, health and welfare before Ofsted. We have aspirations of being Outstanding or maintaining our good at our next inspection but our primary focus is on the education we give our students”

“Although Ofsted is important it is most important to ensure the best outcomes for pupils whether Ofsted are there or not. Ofsted do help to focus schools on what is important but they are not the only reason.”

This figure was very similar for primaries (53%) and secondaries (51%). However, there were differences regionally, with 60% of respondents in the East Midlands identifying Ofsted as the single biggest factor shaping practice, compared to 43% in the East of England.

“Our school ethos and culture is to best meet the needs of our community which is also inline with the Ofsted criteria not the other way round.”

The prominence of Ofsted as a driving force in how schools operate a substantial amount of their business raises a huge question about the extent of its influence and why this is. While the inspection framework aims to ensure quality and accountability, it’s crucial to examine whether its impact aligns with broader educational goals. Is Ofsted fostering a focus on genuine learning and wellbeing, or are schools primarily driven by compliance and the pursuit of positive inspection outcomes?

“I wish it wasn’t like this but we had Ofsted this time last year and up until we had it was definitely a massive factor. This year has been lovely without that pressure.”

The survey data suggests both leaders and boards may feel compelled to prioritise practices that are deemed favourable by Ofsted, potentially at the expense of other valuable approaches based on local

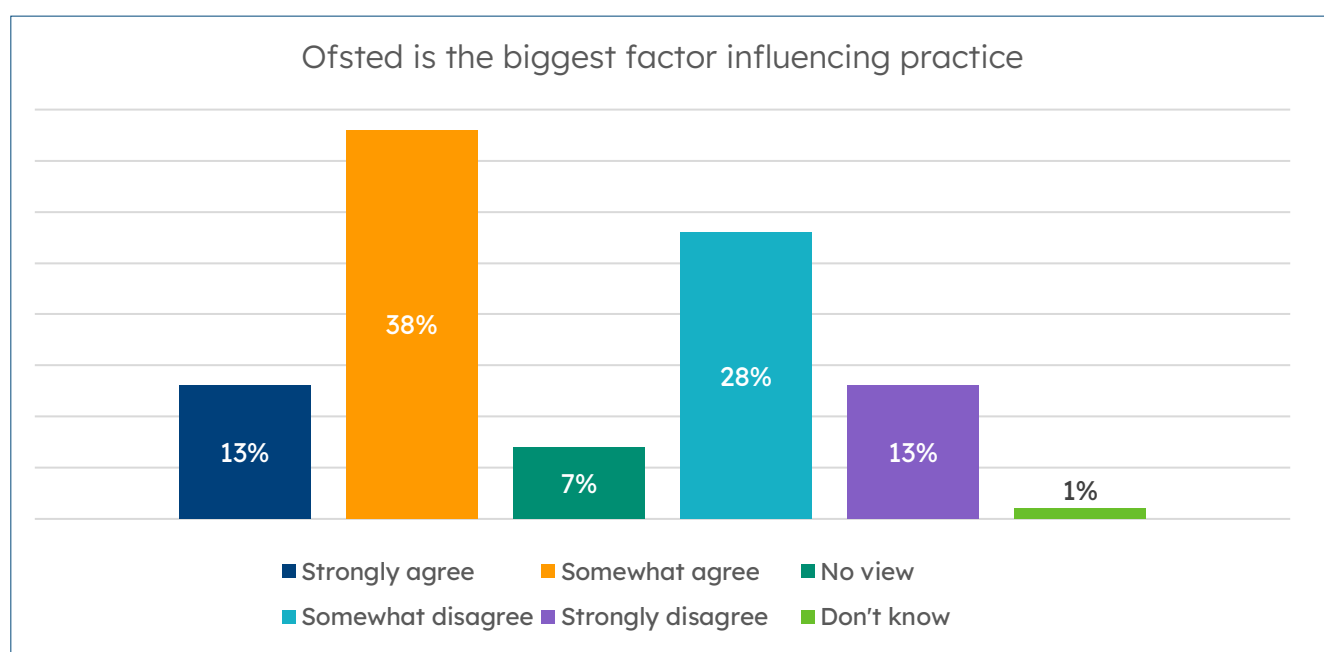


Figure 18, extent to which respondents agree that Ofsted is the biggest factor influencing practice in their school or trust



need. This finding prompts us to consider the potential consequences of a system where external evaluation holds such sway over internal decision-making.

“Ofsted’s judgement defines the school within the external community sadly. However, they have little understanding ...”

### Implications for boards and leaders

The survey results highlight the need for boards to critically examine the ways in which Ofsted influences their practices. Boards and leaders should consider how to move beyond a compliance and an inspection framework-driven approach to enhance educational quality in a meaningful and sustainable way.


It is also crucial to foster open communication with staff, ensuring that everyone understands the rationale behind decisions and feels empowered to contribute to the school’s improvement journey.

“This [Ofsted] is the driver of everything for the Trust. It drives some poor decision making at the central Trust level, often putting school leaders in a tricky position if they don’t agree with what the Trust is asking them to do and implement.”

## Environmental sustainability: progress amidst challenges

Significant progress has been made since the launch of NGA’s [Greener Governance Campaign](#) and the DfE’s climate change and sustainability strategy. This year, the majority of respondents (61%) report that board-level discussions have led to concrete action on environmental sustainability in their schools. Whilst this represents a three percentage point decrease from last year, it remains significantly higher than the levels NGA first reported in 2022 (41%).

Trustees in MATs were most likely to report action happening (67%), followed by SAT trustees (65%), maintained school governors (60%), and finally local governors within MATs (56%). Meanwhile, those in primary (61%) and all-through (72%) schools saw the highest level of action taken.

**61%** of respondents report action being taken on environmental sustainability 

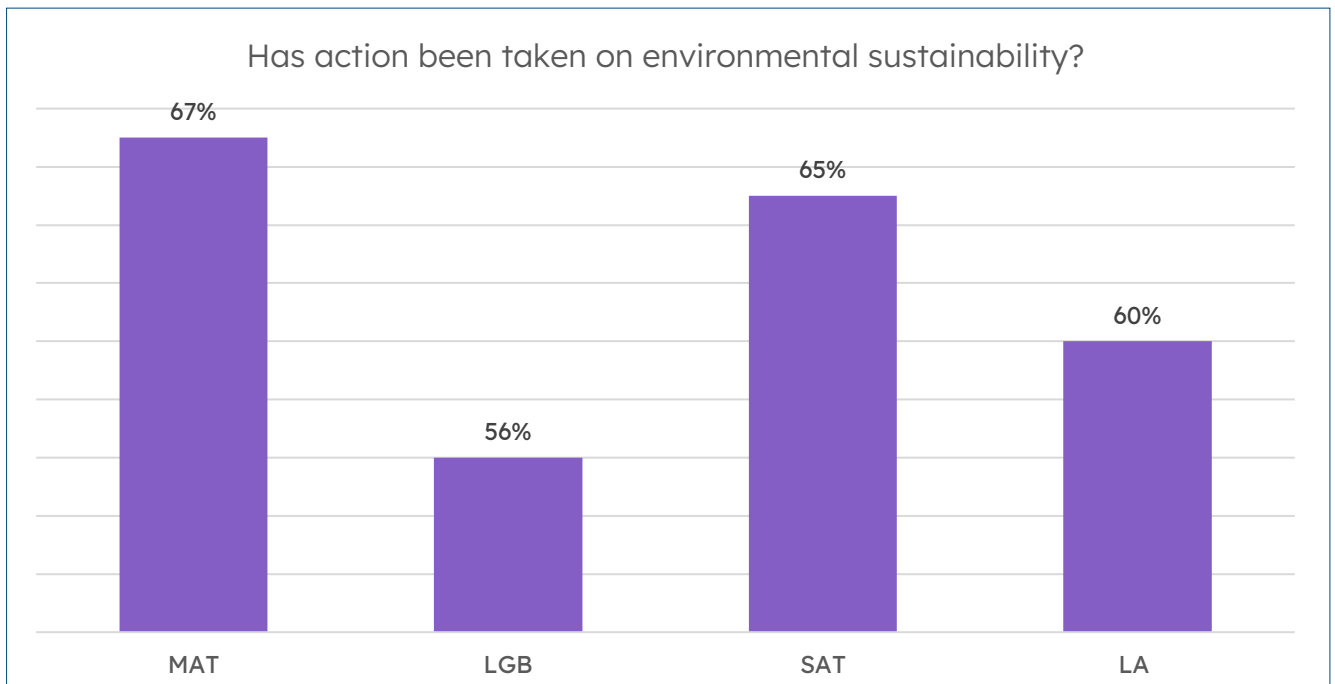


Figure 19, percentage of respondents reporting action taken on environmental sustainability following board discussions across different board types

“We have raised this issue as something to work towards; it is an ongoing effort of low priority but regular consideration, and we dedicate some of our student council time towards addressing this. It is a prime consideration when tendering for services.”

This data suggests that while schools are making strides towards greater environmental responsibility, progress has been hard to maintain. Several factors were shown to contribute to this trend through respondents' comments, including the rising cost of living, energy challenges, building issues and problems with contract negotiations. All of these issues can force some schools and trusts to prioritise immediate financial concerns over longer-term sustainability goals. Additionally, a lack of support and guidance from the DfE was noted by some to be hindering schools' efforts to fully implement sustainable practices.

## Implications for boards and leaders

“We have enough to do simply running the school and staying solvent!!!!”

The survey results underscored differing attitudes to the issue, ranging from being the reported number one priority to it being considered something schools shouldn't worry about given wider external pressures. The results did, however, show that many respondents viewed the issue as something their organisation was getting round to, albeit slowly.

“...to a limited state at present, but it is on the longer term agenda”

The importance of maintaining momentum on environmental sustainability, even in the face of economic and logistical challenges, was something widely disputed. A significant number of comments revealed it was an issue the board and leadership were gently pursuing, but only due to the proactivity of pupils.

Governing boards will need to be mindful that reactive pressures can reduce impact among leadership and staff to tackle more long-term environmental issues. Our results show a varied approach to how engaged the board is in the topic, even when it is being pursued more vigorously by leaders. Yet many comments also show that boards can play an incredibly helpful role by simply preventing the issue falling off agendas through to considering it as a long-term strategic objective, with regular check-ins on progress.

“This is already an area that the school leads on. We ask questions and challenge but they are well ahead of the game”

Meanwhile, leaders must continue to advocate for the resources and support needed to embed sustainability into their school/trust culture and operations. This could involve collaborating with other schools, trusts and other organisations to share best practice, seeking out funding opportunities for sustainability initiatives, and engaging with pupils and staff to raise awareness and generate enthusiasm for environmental action.

“This is led by the school not the board. We are aware of the action taking place”

The survey results show that there is a need for the sector to build a collective commitment to sustainability, with sector voices, boards and leaders co-creating valuable learning opportunities and being willing to openly share them.

# Governance volunteers

## Board diversity: where are we now?

The survey reveals the continuation of a concerning pattern: the lack of diversity among governing boards stubbornly remains prevalent, raising questions about both the ongoing sustainability of the workforce and why the lack of diversity is refusing to shift. Change is needed to make sure boards both reflect school and trust communities, but it is also part of the wider need to attract more volunteers, to reduce the workload of those volunteers who so valiantly continue to do so much.

Key findings include:

- **Age** – only 9% of respondents are under 40, with a mere 1% under 30. The 40-49 age group also saw a decline from 22% last year to 17%.
- **Ethnicity** – a stark lack of ethnic diversity persists, with 95% of respondents identifying as White. This figure has slightly decreased since 2022, despite ongoing efforts to promote diversity. Younger governors and trustees (under 40) are slightly more ethnically diverse, with 10% identifying as belonging to an underrepresented ethnicity.
- **Employment** – 41% of respondents are retired, highlighting a potential gap in representation of working-age individuals and their perspectives.

The lack of ethnic diversity on governing boards is a long-standing issue that potentially undermines the effectiveness and inclusivity of decision-making processes. Boards that do not reflect the diverse communities they serve will likely struggle to understand and address the unique challenges faced by different ethnic groups, leading to policies and decisions that do not fully meet the needs of all stakeholders, including staff and pupils.

There has been little change to representation of minoritised ethnic groups despite all the work done by NGA and others over the past decade. Since we last asked the question in 2022, there has in fact been a slight decrease in the number of respondents identifying as being from Black, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds. This year, of those that chose to disclose their ethnicity, 95% of governors and trustees

surveyed identify as White, 1% of respondents identify as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, 2% identify as Asian/Asian British, and 2% identify being from a mixed or multiple ethnic background.

Younger governors and trustees are more ethnically diverse, with 10% of governors and trustees aged under 40 identifying as being from a minoritised ethnic group, compared with only 2% of those who reported being 40 years and over identifying as being from a Black, Asian or other minoritised ethnic group. While there is hope that with new volunteers, the diversity of boards will improve, this is hindered by the underrepresentation of younger volunteers.

Only 29% of respondents said they were employed full time with a further 10% self-employed and 15% in part time employment. When asked about occupation, those working as professionals within the education sector made up the largest proportion of respondents (34%).

## Implications for boards and leaders

The lack of diversity among governing boards necessitates proactive measures from school and trust leaders and boards. Common issues and strategies that respondents shared included:

- **Recruitment** – attempts to actively seek out and recruit younger individuals and those from underrepresented ethnic groups to join governing boards.
- **Outreach** – there were examples shared of boards partnering with community organisations, local businesses and faith groups to reach a wider pool of potential volunteers.
- **Training and support** – comprehensive training and ongoing support for volunteers was discussed as both a crucial element of board sustainability, but several times also referred to as being overwhelming, raising the crucial issues of achieving the right balance.
- **Succession planning** – some respondents suggested they had struggled to develop a robust succession plan to ensure a smooth transition of leadership and maintain continuity of knowledge and experience.

- **Culture of inclusion** – a small number of respondents felt their board struggled to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment within the governing board, suggesting further opportunities to ensure all perspectives are valued.

By prioritising diversity and inclusion in governance, school leaders can strengthen the effectiveness of their boards, ensuring they better reflect and serve the needs of their communities. A diverse governing board is more likely to make informed decisions that benefit all pupils, staff, and stakeholders.

## Recruitment and employment

The challenges with recruiting new governing board members remains largely consistent with last year – 76% of respondents agreed that they find it difficult to recruit and only 19% disagreed. This is a trend we have seen worsen since 2015 when we first asked the question, when 50% of respondents reported challenges with recruitment (figure 21).

Worryingly, the number of respondents who reported that their board had no vacancies is continually decreasing, with the figure now standing at 25%. This

is down five percentage points since 2022 and 17 percentage points since 2016. Further to this, the levels of boards with two or more vacancies reached an all-time high (44%), up a staggering thirteen percentage points since 2015 (31%) and six percentage points since last year alone.

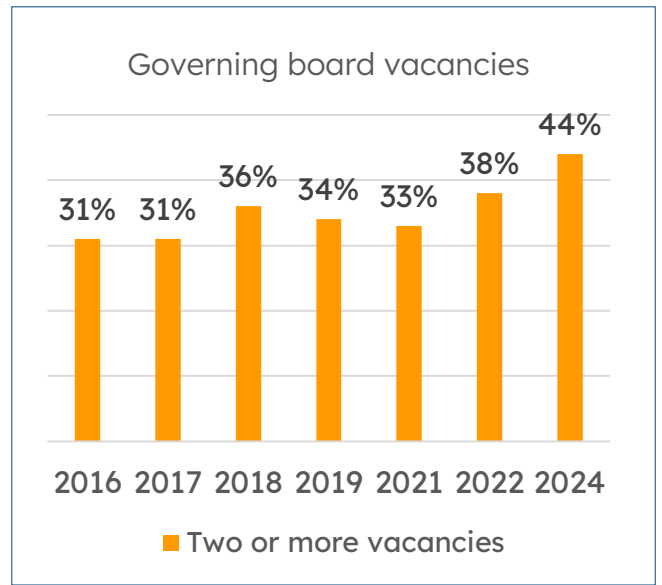


Figure 20, percentage of respondents that reported having two or more vacancies on their governing board from 2016 to 2024

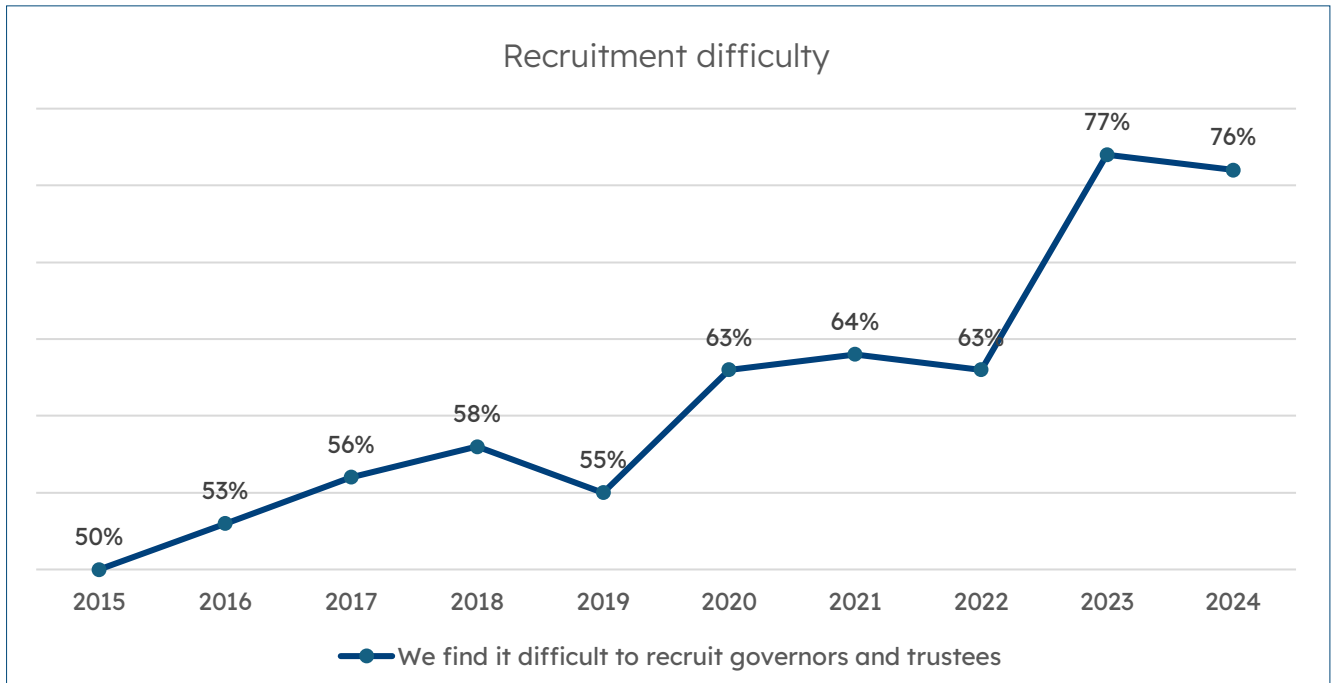


Figure 21, percentage of respondents that agree or strongly agree that recruiting governors or trustees to their board is difficult across several years (2015 to 2024)

Regional variations highlight the uneven distribution of recruitment difficulties:

- **Yorkshire and Humber** – 86% of respondents face recruitment challenges
- **London** – 69% of respondents struggle with recruitment

## Motivation to govern and what volunteers think

When asked what first made governance volunteers aware of the opportunity to govern, respondents indicated a variety of reasons. The most common pathways reported were:

- having a child at the school (30% of respondents)
- working in education (26%)
- being approached by the school or trust (19%)
- being approached by a personal/professional connection (13%)

Unsurprisingly, those under 40 were more likely to say they first found out about governing due to having a child at the school (50%) and those aged 18 to 29 were most likely to start governing because they work in education (42%) or because they were approached directly by the school or trust (32%).

Appointment directly by the governing board (often referred to as co-opted roles) has always been the most common way by which governors and trustees are appointed and increasingly so, reported by 53% of this year's respondents, compared with 39% in 2016.

There is a committed core of governance volunteers who have dedicated their time, energy and passion to supporting school communities for many years with 35% of respondents having governed for 11 years or longer and an additional 27% for between five to 10 years.

Only 11% of respondents began their governance role in the last 12 months and a further 14% have been governing for between one to two years. There was some variation by board type – combining these groups who are relatively new to governance, trustees had the highest number of new recruits, with 29% governing in SATs two years and under, followed by MATs (26%). New recruits to maintained boards were slightly lower at 24%. Local governors reported the fewest new recruits (21%).

41% of respondents were retired, up from 35% last year and the highest proportion of respondents since we first asked about employment status in 2017 when it was 28%.

Over half of respondents (54%) are employed, this includes part time employment (15%), full time employment (29%) and those who are self-employed (10%).



Figure 22, respondents' employment status

Note: small numbers of respondents identified their employment status as either studying or unemployed. These responses represented less than 1% of the total sample.

## Implications for boards and leaders

Persistent recruitment challenges, coupled with an aging demographic of current volunteers, necessitates a proactive and multi-faceted approach from leaders and boards working together. Respondents provided a number of suggestions and considerations, including:

- **Targeted recruitment** – the need to develop strategies that appeal to both working-age individuals and retirees. These include tailored messaging to highlight the specific benefits of governance for each group, such as professional development opportunities for working professionals or flexible time commitments for retirees.
- **Succession planning** – implement a robust succession plan to ensure a smooth transition of leadership and maintain continuity of knowledge and experience. Actively mentor and develop newer volunteers to prepare them for future leadership roles.
- **Streamlined onboarding** – the creation of a streamlined onboarding process that is welcoming, informative, and supportive, ensuring new board members feel valued and equipped to contribute effectively. Offer mentorship programs to help new volunteers integrate into the board and understand their roles and responsibilities.
- **Continuous development** – invest in ongoing training and development for volunteers, enhancing their skills and knowledge to maximise their contribution. Offer a variety of training formats, such as online courses, workshops, and conferences, to cater to different learning styles and preferences.
- **Recognition and appreciation** – acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of governance volunteers, fostering a culture of appreciation and recognition for their valuable service. Regularly express gratitude for their time and commitment and highlight their impact on the school community.
- **Collaboration** – partner with local organisations, businesses, and community groups to raise awareness of governance opportunities and expand the pool of potential candidates. Leverage social media and other communication channels to reach a wider audience.

Addressing the demographic shifts and investing in effective recruitment and retention strategies will help boards and leaders to attract a diverse and talented pool of volunteers who can contribute to strong governance in schools and trusts for years to come.

## Our volunteers: survey snapshot

### The time it takes to govern

Most annual survey respondents reported spending between 10 and 15 hours on governance duties a month (32%). At most (15 hours) this would equate to 2 full working days a month where a working day is 7.5 hours. However, a very similar amount reported spending less than 10 hours (31%).

Annual survey figures are therefore slightly lower than the reported time spent in NGA's recent [A Matter of time study](#) which found the median average time spent on a governance role to be 17 hours a month or 2.3 working days a month.

### Region

As with previous annual surveys, we gathered most responses from the South East (22%) and North West (16%) and the fewest from the North East (5%) and those whose group of schools spans multiple regions (1%).

### Phase

Those who govern in primary (63%) and secondary (21%) school settings made up the majority of respondents in this year's survey, as has been the case in previous years. Over the past two years we have seen a drop in those from nursery settings from 8% in 2022 to just 1% in 2024.

### Board type

Maintained school governors represented 50% of respondents in 2024. Those governing SATs (9%) decreased by two-percentage points whilst MAT trustees (25%) and local governors (16%) each saw a one-percentage point increase. This is the lowest figure for SAT respondents since the survey began.

### Board size

One in five respondents (20%) reported that their board currently has less than 8 members. The majority of respondents (43%) reported having between 8 and 10 members. A further 27% have 11 to 13, 8% have 14 to 16, 2% have more than 16 and 1% don't know.

## Time off to govern: a decreasing trend

The survey reveals a decline in the number of governors and trustees receiving paid time off for their governance duties. In 2024, only 29% of respondents reported receiving paid time off, a significant drop from 43% in 2015. While the majority of those who receive time off do so on a paid basis, a notable proportion (12%) still take time off work unpaid to volunteer.

There are a mix of reasons for this, and it is encouraging that those employers who have refused time off altogether are still a minority at 2%. Nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents reported that while they don't get time off to govern, they also hadn't asked their employer if this is an option.

Interestingly, age plays a significant role in access to time off. Younger respondents (18-29 years old) are significantly more likely to receive paid (47%) or unpaid (18%) time off than older age groups.

## Implications for boards and leaders

The declining trend in paid time off for governance raises several important considerations for both boards and leaders:

- **Diversity and inclusion** – explore strategies to encourage and support the participation of individuals with different working patterns and needs,

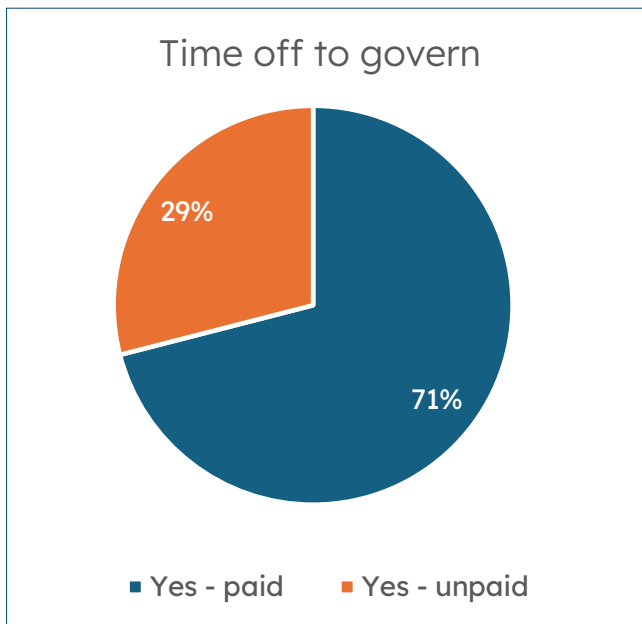


Figure 23, percentage of respondents receiving time off work to govern (unpaid and paid)

offering flexible arrangements to the school or trust's own staff who may want to govern in another organisation.

- **Recognition** – help drive wider levels of recognition and value among employers who support their employees to govern, promoting the contribution to their professional skills.
- **Communication and transparency** – foster open communication with staff and leaders about the importance of governance and the nature of the of the voluntary role, building understanding for why meetings can't always be held at the most convenient time for school/trust staff and leaders.

By addressing these issues, boards can foster a more inclusive and effective governance cohort, ensuring that a diverse range of voices and perspectives contribute to the decision-making process because meetings are accessible and there is understanding around work commitments.

## Board development: focusing on continuous improvement

The survey reveals a strong emphasis on board development and effectiveness, with the majority of governing boards actively engaging in self-evaluation and review processes. The combined use of skills audits, and internal/external reviews is becoming increasingly prevalent, indicating a commitment to continuous improvement and a culture of good governance.

Key findings include:

- **Skills audits** – 78% of respondents completed a skills audit, with 67% finding it useful. Single schools were more likely to complete and find value in this exercise. This is slowly starting to climb back up from 74% of respondents in 2021 when we saw a significant drop compared to 87% in 2019.
- **Governance reviews** – 42% conducted an internal review, and 12% undertook an external review. MAT trustees were most likely to conduct reviews, while local governors were least likely.

While the findings suggest that governing boards increasingly recognise the importance of regular self-assessment and external validation, respondents raised some issues:

“It is our belief that evaluation of our work is up to the trust, not ourselves, so we do not carry out self-evaluation exercises.”

“The Trust Governance team worked with us to evaluate the board and understand roles and responsibilities.”

“We do a skills audit. A vast amount of training is offered by the Trust. Sometimes so much it can be overwhelming. You need to be selective depending on your skill base.”

These comments and others reveal a diverse and sometimes inconsistent approach to board reviews across schools and trusts. They highlight a spectrum of practices, ranging from reliance on external evaluations to internal self-assessments, and expose both the strengths and weaknesses in current governance review processes. Some boards demonstrate proactive engagement, aligning reviews with significant events like leadership changes or incorporating them into regular training. Others show a more passive stance, deferring to trust-level evaluations or external inspections.

The comments also hint at challenges in follow-up, with a number of respondents pointing out the lack of action on identified issues. Additionally, there’s an indication of potential overload in some schools and trusts, with training and development opportunities sometimes seen as excessive.

## Implications for boards and leaders

The emphasis on board development presents several opportunities for the collective responsibility of the board, facilitated where required by leaders:

- **Prioritise board effectiveness** – discuss openly the value and experience of reviewing practice and facilitate ongoing board development activities.
- **Champion annual self-evaluation** – promote a culture of self-reflection and continuous improvement within the annual cycle of the governing board, ensuring reviews are conducted regularly and findings actioned.
- **Seek external expertise** – collectively own a cycle

of external feedback, conduct periodic reviews of governance and provide objective feedback on board performance.

- **Foster collaboration** – encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing between governing boards, facilitating the exchange of best practices and lessons learned.
- **Invest in governance development as a must, not a nice to have** – allocate resources to support board development activities such as training materials, reviews, online tools, and access to expert advice.

By buying in to the investment in board development, school and trust leaders can help ensure that their governing boards are well-equipped to provide effective oversight, strategic direction, and support for the school or trust mission and goals. A high-functioning governing board focused on the long-term success and sustainability of any educational institution is not something that should be left unsupported.

## Managing the role

In 2024, we asked a more limited number of questions on the role, its manageability and workload and indications of continuing in the role. This was primarily as we also published our extensive [governance workload report](#) in the first half of this academic year. However, we did take a temperature-check on two of the issues explored:

1. There has been a four percentage point increase in respondents who are considering resigning from their governance role (30%) compared to 2023.
2. 76% of respondents agreed that their governance role was manageable around their professional and/or personal commitments, a decrease of four-percentage points compared to 2023. However, those who strongly disagree has doubled (6%).



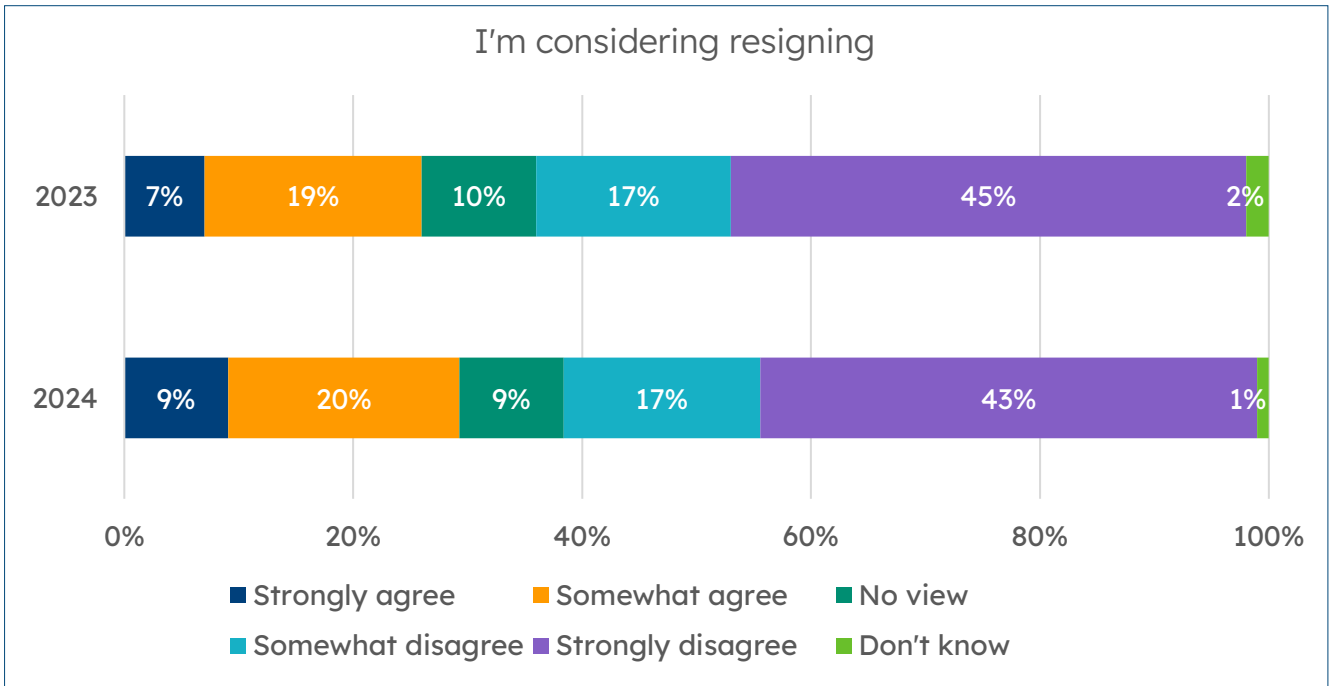


Figure 24, percentage of respondents indicating agreement that they are considering resigning from their governance role (shown over two years)

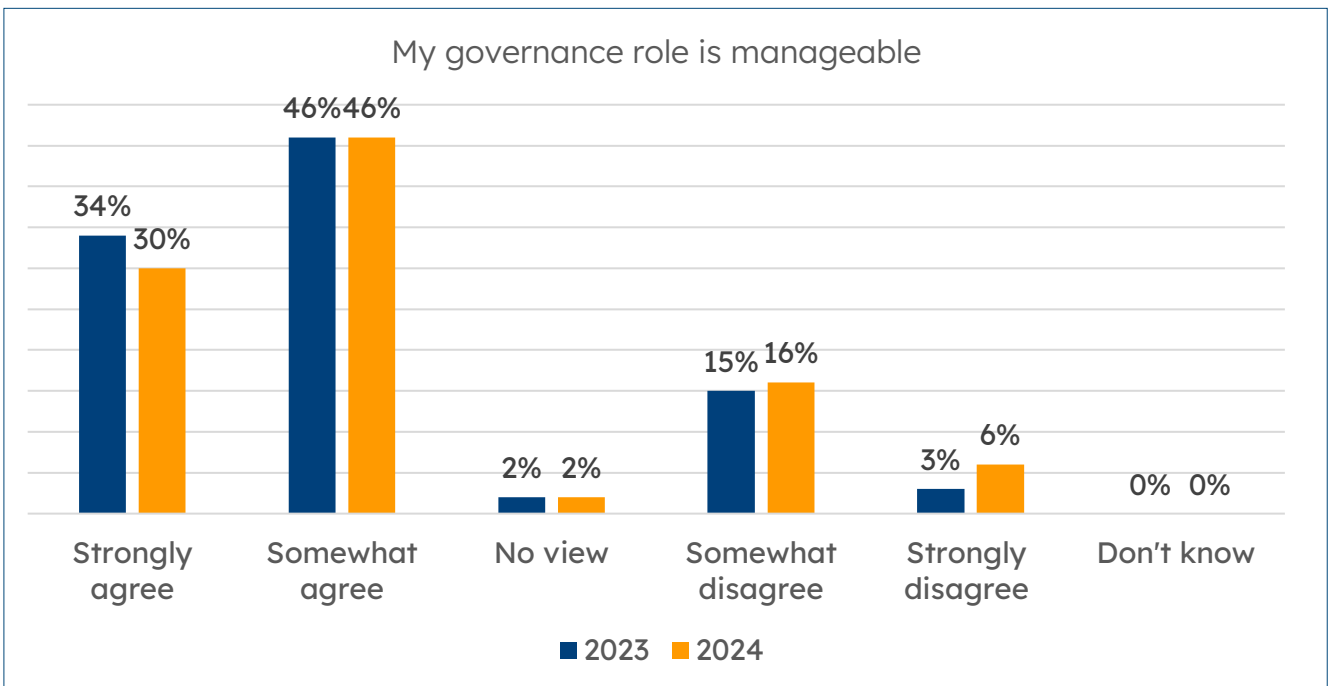


Figure 25, percentage of respondents indicating agreement that their governance role is manageable around other commitments (shown over two years)





# Conclusion

The 2024 Annual School and Trust Governance Survey paints a full picture of the challenges and opportunities facing governing boards in England. The financial strain on schools is no longer open to debate. The situation is reaching new levels of urgency in the primary phase as pupil numbers continue to fall, alongside SEND needs reaching new heights.

Persistent pupil absenteeism, especially in secondary schools, continues to demand attention, but boards are seeking innovative solutions. The sector needs to be encouraged to come together and prioritise collaboration with parents to build trust and address the barriers to attendance. This will require both academic and wellbeing support.

The survey also highlights both the continuing challenge of recruiting volunteers and in particular the ongoing struggle to build diverse governing boards with the long-identified notable underrepresentation of younger individuals and minoritised ethnic groups. The decline in paid time off for governance duties further exacerbates this challenge, potentially limiting the pool of potential volunteers. It places a new focus on the role of employers and businesses in alleviating some of these pressures, and how the sector can engage with them. As our younger generation enters employment, we can be more proactive in showing them the value that governing can bring to them individually, as well as to their school and trust. Their thinking can bring a greater diversity of perspective to boards which can be embraced and built upon.

Meanwhile, we are so fortunate to have a strong group of existing committed volunteers. Those who volunteer while balancing work, family and personal commitments can be an inspiration to those who have not yet been persuaded, or who are simply unaware of the opportunity to govern and its potential impact. The devotion of the retired cohort of volunteers is a staggering example of being dedicated to not just a civic duty, but to the profound belief in shaping a better future for the next generation through education. This selfless engagement demonstrates how their wealth of experience and wisdom can have a lasting impact on society after their professional careers have ended.

For all who volunteer, whatever their age or background, their level of public service goes beyond obligation, reflecting a deep-seated passion for their community and a genuine desire to contribute time and thought to support schools and children and young people. The dedication and resilience shown by governors and trustees across England give us reason for optimism.

Looking to the future, the role of governing boards is crucial in navigating the complexities and challenges schools and their pupils face. In the report we have identified the key implications for boards and leaders. Sharing of successes and failures will help improve practice and while NGA plays a role here, collaborative approaches will pay dividends. It requires a renewed commitment to the mission of providing excellent education for all pupils, not only the ones within your school walls.

As we welcome a new government, we look forward to all working together towards a more robust and inclusive education system.



## Key asks

With the government addressing the following key areas, school leaders and governing boards can work together to create a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable education system that empowers all pupils to reach their full potential.

To address the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities identified by this survey, NGA calls for:

### 1. Focus on financial sustainability

We recognise the new government has many financial challenges to consider, but the lives of our future generations are not the choice to take a gamble on by waiting and seeing what happens.

We call on the government to allocate funding saved by falling rolls to increase pupil premium and per-pupil funding. Moreover, the government must urgently invest in crumbling school buildings and increase funding for SEND provision. SEND funding reform is crucial, but schools cannot wait for another long-term review to address the growing gap between needs and resources.

### 2. Urgently address SEND provision gaps

NGA urges the new government not to simply start again but utilise and build on the needs identified through the SEND green paper. An audit of sufficiency of special school places is needed, as is much better training and support for mainstream staff to be able to cope with ever more complex and diverse needs.

### 3. Action to address child poverty and expand family services

NGA welcomes the new government's manifesto pledge to take key steps to confront child poverty. Many families are experiencing unprecedented levels of need due to rising poverty and the reduction of support services in both the public and third sectors. We fully support Labour's aspiration to reduce child poverty and look forward to discussing the full range of initiatives to support young people in addition to breakfast clubs.

### 4. Develop a long-term staffing strategy

Teachers' pay growth has lagged behind earnings growth in the wider labour market since 2010/11. The government need to develop a long long-term pay strategy that will address the teacher supply challenge.

The government must also recognise the distinct challenges across phases, with teacher shortages in secondary schools and the impact of falling pupil numbers in primary.

### 5. Invest in governance

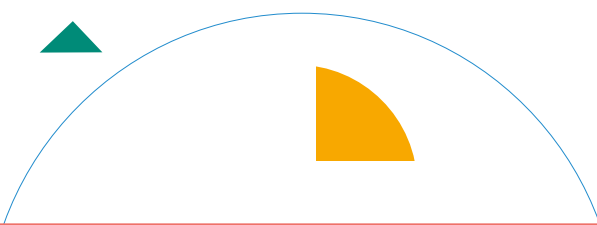
We urge the government to fund a national marketing campaign to raise the profile of school and trust governance. The government need to prioritise diversity and inclusion in recruitment efforts, actively seeking out younger individuals and those from underrepresented groups. Investment in awareness, development and support for new and existing governors and trustees is vital to maximise the power and potential of governance.



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